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Conceptualizing Authorship in Late Imperial Chinese Philology

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Leiden, February 2020

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Introduction

Text and interpretation, philology and authorship

The written word tends to be stubborn. Only the most drastic measures can change what a text says. This leads to the problem, common to all text-based cultures with a sufficiently long history, of such changed expectations among the reading audience that hallowed writings no longer immediately make sense. At that point, a text seems dated, and its stories speak to concerns that have become obsolete and propagate values no longer shared. How did custodians of textual traditions avoid having to discard their texts? One customary way of solving this problem was to read them allegorically.[1] Such a reading leaves the surface intact while it alters the interpretation, sometimes fundamentally, by introducing a non-explicit layer of meaning. A Chinese anecdote from the 3rd century BCE gives a succinct summary of this approach: Composing a letter at night, a man asked his servant to "raise the candle." In a slip of the pen, he included these words in his letter. When the recipient, a high official, read, "raise the candle," he understood it as a metaphor for promoting wise men in government. He enthusiastically put it into practice, and in the end, the measure had very beneficial results for the state.[2] The power of allegory is that it endows even the most trivial utterances with deep significance without challenging the wording of the text.

The tension between written words and meaning can be conceptualized as one between two conflicting imperatives. On the one hand, the received text's authority demands that it be passed on unchanged, letter for letter and character for character. This has been called "preservation of the text" (*Textpflege*). At the same time, a text still must speak to its readers, and this is achieved through "preservation of meaning" (*Sinnpflege*),[3] for which allegory is one important tool. Preservation does not imply adherence to an interpretation formulated in the past, but the creation of one that relates to questions current at a given time.

As researchers in the 20th century usually understood it, the discipline of philology concerned itself with the preservation of the text and paid little to no attention to meaning.[4] Based on recent

[1] Allegory is chief among the means "by which the old document may be induced to signify what it cannot be said to have expressly stated." Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 40.

[2] "Wai chushuo zuo shang" 外儲說左上 (Outer Storage of Sayings, Upper Left), in Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Collected Explanations of the Han Feizi) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 301.

[3] For these two terms, see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2013 [1992]), 88-96.

[4] That is to say that according to this view, it is not the duty of philologists to make a text speak to their contemporaries. Kermode, for example, admits as much when he limits the enterprise of philology to the reconstruction of historical meanings. Kermode, *The Classic*, 40.

developments in the research on this subject, however, I employ the term philology in its broad sense. I understand it as the study of a text as text. This encompasses everything from materiality and transmission history to use of language, variant readings and interpretation.[5] The inclusion of interpretation in this list is a recognition of the "lack of any pre-hermeneutic moment in our textual relations."[6] No matter how innocent it seems, every textual operation ultimately makes an interpretative statement. Philology, in other words, is intrinsically concerned with the preservation of meaning. Historically, at times when philology dominated the discourse, scholars constructed their arguments around textual problems and buttressed their claims with quotations that displayed their familiarity with the sources. The expert who could join the discussion was an expert on the text, and not the perceptive interpreter. Yet it is often only against the background of interpretative problems that the full significance of a philological problem becomes clear.

One of the central tasks of philology is to determine the authorship of a work. Usually, philologists rely on the historical information contained within the text and the writing style to judge whether the assumed author could really have written the work. If a text describes events that occurred when the assumed author must have been dead, it is a good indication that the ascription may not be correct. Such a judgment, however, is again part of a larger framework. The name of the author functions as a classifier,[7] and guarantees the legibility of a text by anchoring it in time and space. As such, scholars can manipulate it in various ways to affirm or negate its value. Calling a text forged is the most straightforward way to undermine its status. Subtler challenges limit themselves to certain sections of a work, and the sections chosen for criticism sometimes reveal more about the scholar who picked them than the work under scrutiny. All discussions about authorship are implicated in, though not reducible to, interpretative questions. This is the perspective from which I will discuss them here.

Concepts of authorship and their role in Qing philology

During the Qing 清 dynasty (1644-1912), especially in the 18th and early 19th centuries, philology dominated the intellectual scene in China. Scholars spent years, if not decades, of their lives working through ancient dictionaries to master the challenging archaic language of

[5] Cf. Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction," in idem, Benjamin Elman and Ku-ming Kevin Chang (eds.), *World Philology* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2015), 12.
[6] Michelle R. Warren, "The Politics of Textual Scholarship," in Neil Fraistat and Julia Flanders, *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 131.
[7] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in idem, *Dits et écrits 1: 1954-1969* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 798.

the classics. They collated early texts on an unprecedented scale in order to restore their original appearance, and studied the details of their histories of transmission. The scholarship of this era is known as "evidential learning" (*kaozheng xue* 考證學).

In this dissertation, I offer a new perspective on evidential learning by analyzing the conceptual framework on which it rested. I argue that Qing scholars employed a narrow concept of authorship that posited only one author for each text. This shaped the ways they approached texts from the pre-imperial period (ca. 5th to 3rd century BCE). Employing this narrow concept focused attention on the different voices contained in these often multi-layered texts, and so Qing scholars used authorship to delegitimize some voices as they tried to establish with greater precision biographical details of the speakers they identified so as to assess their credibility. Authorship mattered because Qing scholars recognized that the author's perspective influenced what kind of story they were able to read.

The consequences of this author-centered approach become visible in the ways Qing scholars approached the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語). Everyone agreed that this repository of the words and deeds of Confucius 孔子 (trad. 551-479 BCE) had been put together by his disciples. This knowledge, however, raised the question of the transmitters' reliability. In their discussions, scholars set out to save the authority of the *Analects* by establishing, as precisely as possible, which disciple was responsible for including which saying in the text, or by revaluating the content based on their expectations of sagely behavior. Under the philological gaze, the received text fell apart into conflicting strands of rival stories and the scholars had to find a way to put the pieces back together.

In my analysis of scholarly discussions on the reliability of the *Analects* and other issues of a similar nature, I consider several questions: What were the criteria by which scholars delegitimized some of the voices contained in a text? On what grounds did they justify their textual operations? If every textual operation is an interpretation, which interpretation found the most widespread support? Conversely, which elements of this type of scholarship became the target of contemporary critics? These questions are central to understanding the epistemic and doctrinal foundations of Chinese philology as practiced in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Literature review

In the last four decades, scholars have generally approached the topic of Qing evidential learning from three different angles. In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars looked for what could be

termed the "indigenous sprouts of modernity." Going back to the Chinese modernization discourse of the early 20th century, the distinctive characteristic of this approach is that it focuses on the achievements of Qing scholars in technical fields such as mathematics, astronomy, historical geography and phonology, highlighting their proto-scientific quality. Benjamin Elman, for example, worked within this framework. His studies that focus on the 18th century provide convincing arguments for the importance of social factors, such as career opportunities in the history of evidential studies, but he does not address the doctrinal struggles carried out with the same philological tools in the field of classical studies.[8] Instead, in his most recent work on the subject, Elman maintains that Qing "classicists advocated an impartial program" of research.[9] This holds up philology as an idealized pursuit of truth, which ignores the fact that Qing scholars used philology as a means to very different ends. Philology constituted a discourse within which they spoke to each other, and one has to exercise caution and distinguish their goals, formulated as ideals, from what they argued in their research practice. Elman's studies highlight the social developments that gave rise to evidential studies but obscure the intellectual principles on which it was based.

From the 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century, by contrast, most researchers who dealt with Qing evidential studies used hermeneutics as their interpretative framework, especially as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002).[10] Consequently, researchers paid more attention to the assumptions evidential scholars brought to the texts they read. The hermeneutical approach questions the existence of objective truths and probes the historical-intellectual circumstances of understanding. Michael Quirin has argued through a case study on the Qing scholar Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1816) that description and value judgment remained closely intertwined in evidential scholarship.[11] Quirin's conclusions contradict assessments of evidential studies as impartial or even objective scholarship. Similarly, Shao Dongfang claimed

[8] Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology. Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984).
[9] Benjamin Elman, "Early Modern or Late Imperial? The Crisis of Classical Philology in Eighteenth-Century China," in Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin Elman and Chang Ku-ming (eds.), *World Philology*, 231. Elman's follow-up to *From Philosophy to Philology* convincingly argues for the political implications inherent in New Text Confucianism of the 19th century and traces its attempts to distinguish itself from competing interpretations, but does not substantially modify his conclusions about scholarship of the 18th century. See Benjamin Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship. The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
[10] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960).
[11] Michael Quirin, "Scholarship, Value, Method, and Hermeneutics in kaozheng: Some Reflections on Cui Shu (1740-1816) and the Confucian Classics," in *History and Theory*, vol. 35, no. 4, December 1996, 34-53.

that Cui Shu drew no distinction between scholarly truth and value judgment.[12] In an encompassing study of the intellectual history of the late imperial China, Kai-Wing Chow has stressed the purist and ritualist tendencies that guided the application of evidential studies.[13] These authors have shown that the hermeneutic approach can productively address the scholarly disputes of the Qing dynasty. Many studies carried out in this framework, however, exhibit a tendency towards the abstract, philosophical questions inherent in hermeneutics, neglecting the practices of textual studies.[14] Interest in the entanglement between actual philological methods and preconceived notions remains on the level of the case study, more often than not of the work of Cui Shu. By terming his scholarship an "alternative" to standard evidential studies, Kai-Wing Chow reinforces the idealization of 18th-century scholarship.[15] As a result, the mechanisms by which biases inherent in Qing dynasty scholarship affected research and argumentation remain uncharted. Considering those mechanisms will allow us to identify and understand characteristic features of evidential learning that distinguish it from other types of scholarship.

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in philology's development into a distinct academic discipline, with a special focus on early modern times (16th to 18th centuries).[16] Ultimately rooted in the history of scholarship,[17] this project traces how deeply philology, in both its methods and its results, has been shaped by the assumptions held by individual practitioners. Despite the apparent idiosyncrasy of many of their assumptions, the philologists of early modern times and the results of their research have long been hailed as scholarly examples and praised for their objectivity, a view that many recent publications dispute. Today

[12] Shao Dongfang 邵東方, *Cui Shu xueshu kaolun* 崔述學術考論 (A Critical Study of Cui Shu's [1740-1816] Scholarship) (Taibei: Airiti Press, 2010 [1997]), 285.
[13] Most extensively in Kai-Wing Chow, *The Rise of Confucian Ritualism in Late Imperial China. Ethics, Classics and Lineage Discourse* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994).
[14] Cf. the essays collected in the following edited volumes: Kai-Wing Chow, On-cho Ng and John B. Henderson (eds.), *Imagining Boundaries. Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). Ching-I Tu (ed.), *Classics and Interpretations. The Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture* (New Jersey: Transaction, 2000). Ching-I Tu (ed.), *Interpretation and Intellectual Change. Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (New Brunswick: Transaction publishers, 2005).
[15] Kai-Wing Chow, "An Alternative Hermeneutics of Truth. Cui Shu's Evidential Scholarship on Confucius" in Ching-I Tu (ed.), *Interpretation and Intellectual Change. Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, 19-31.
[16] James Crewdson Turner, *Philology. The Forgotten Origins of Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014). Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin Elman and Chang Ku-ming (eds.), *World Philology* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2015). Anthony Grafton and Glenn Most (eds.), *Canonical Texts and Scholarly Practices. A Global Comparative Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016).
[17] Perhaps most influentially Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text. The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991).

historians of philology argue that the motivations behind even the most arcane applications of textual scholarship must be taken seriously.[18]

Taking philology as a distinct field of knowledge production, tied to specific actors and their beliefs, opens promising avenues for understanding the unique features of this scholarly activity.[19] In textual scholarship, there is always more at stake than the individual word or character since this word or character is embedded in a larger interpretative system. Despite the eminently global orientation of this approach, scholars have only just begun to study late imperial Chinese scholarship based on this new understanding of philology.[20] Furthermore, some research gravitates towards case-based, source-heavy research that neglects the more abstract concepts that played a role in the work of early modern philologists. As I argue in this study, the concept of authorship informed critical questions Qing scholars raised and the ways they addressed them.

Methodology

Combining the strengths of the hermeneutical and the philological-historical approaches, this dissertation analyzes how the concepts and preconceived notions of mid-Qing scholars shaped their textual scholarship. Based on a close reading of their writings, I show how they defended their beliefs by applying methods that were supposed to guarantee objective and factually correct results. These methods include copious quotations from primary and secondary sources, extensive inquiries into transmission histories and attention to the usage of period-specific language.

The working assumption of Qing textual scholarship was that every text belonged to one author. This *narrow* concept of authorship understands text production as a process where one person has an idea and writes it down by himself. In other words, the author is the originator of the content and the creator of the written text[21] in one person.[22] There is now broad consensus that

[18] See Grafton, *Defenders of the Text*, 161.
[19] In a recent article, Nathan Vedal has shown that contemporary cosmological speculations inspired phonological innovations in the Ming dynasty. See his "New Scripts for All Sounds: Cosmology and Universal Phonetic Notation Systems in Late Imperial China," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 78, no. 1, June 2018, 1-46.
[20] One such work is Ori Sela, *China's Philological Turn. Scholars, Textualism, and the Dao in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia UP, 2018).
[21] At the very least, the originator of content is also centrally involved in the process of textual creation. For example, this could mean that he is dictating, as was the practice in European antiquity. See Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship. An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 34.
[22] For recent takes on how to conceptualize authorship and authenticity, especially for pre-modern texts, see the following: Armin Daniel Baum, *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum. Mit ausgewählten Quellentexten samt deutscher Übersetzung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001). Scott McGill,

this model is not applicable to most early Chinese texts (those believed to have their roots in the pre-imperial period) in their received form. Instead, as Paul Fischer has argued, there is good reason to assume that what we think of as a "text" took shape over long periods of time, during which bits and pieces circulated independently and in competing versions.[23] There was not one, but many authors for what later became a single text named after one person. Most Qing scholars did not think along these lines, thus there existed a discrepancy between concept and research material: They expected to read texts by a single author, but could not ignore the fact that early texts did not fit into this mold. My interest lies in the productive tension to which this discrepancy gave rise. Scholars had to adapt their judgments to the actual features of the texts, which they did by assigning ownership of individual passages and whole chapters to historical figures. They used the model of school traditions to identify the historical actors and coupled these identifications with value judgments. Thus, in Qing portrayals, the original master was an infallible source of wisdom and responsible for the "best" parts of a work, while his followers were at best partially reliable transmitters who could be blamed for problematic content.

The sources I use span the period from roughly 1750 to 1820. These decades constitute the pinnacle of evidential learning, situated between the formative first century of the Qing dynasty and the loss of its dominant position in the discourse during the decades leading up to the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), when widespread warfare disrupted the pursuit of scholarship.[24] All sources relevant to my analysis can be found in prose collections (*wenji* 文集), some published during the author's lifetime, some posthumously. These collections consist of prefaces and letters, as well as brief essays that often discuss one specific issue or text. The short essay, in the form of an analysis (*bian* 辨), study (*kao* 考) or discussion (*lun* 論), was the preferred format in which many Qing scholars discussed issues related either to the authorship of pre-imperial texts or to the way scholarship was to be done, and this constitutes the key

Plagiarism in Latin Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012). Irene Peirano, *The Rhetoric of the Roman Fake: Latin Pseudepigrapha in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012). Javier Martinez (ed.), *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature. Ergo Decipiatur!* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Christian Schwermann and Raji Steineck (eds.), *That Wonderful Composite Called Author. Authorship in East Asian Literatures from the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). The introduction of this last work gives a detailed overview of the different roles the figure of the author can play.

[23] Cf. Paul Fischer, "Authentication Studies (辨偽學) Methodology and the Polymorphous Text Paradigm," in *Early China* 32, 2008-2009, 1f.

[24] Chinese-language scholarship refers to this period as the Qian-Jia era (Qian-Jia *shidai* 乾嘉時代), after the Qianlong 乾隆 (1736-1796) and Jiaqing 嘉慶 (1796-1820) reigns that coincide with these intellectual developments.

source material for my analysis. More extensive works such as monographs and commentaries engage with these issues less frequently, therefore they are less important for this dissertation.

All Qing figures usually considered to have been evidential scholars in recent scholarship make their appearance at some point in the following pages. However, I do not draw a strict line separating them from their contemporaries not usually considered due to their distance from the academic mainstream. The assumption behind my inclusive approach to the *dramatis personae* is that there was significant overlap in both methodology and topic. The assumptions of evidential learning were so pervasive that hardly anyone went public with his opinion without the accompanying apparatus of textual evidence. Everyone spoke the same language. At the same time, the issues I discuss concerned a sizeable number of researchers in one way or another, regardless of their intellectual affiliation. Challenges to author-ascriptions that had been accepted for centuries, for example, were bound to create controversy; therefore, many scholars formulated their own take on the issue. Besides the *Analects* already mentioned above, struggles around authorship extended to the *Venerated Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳) and the preface to the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經). Furthermore, by including figures besides the big names of the period such as Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724-1777) and Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804), I show that the discourse was not limited to a few intellectual giants. Within the circle of educated elites, philology had a broad basis among scholars who contributed to and sustained research.

Contributions

The goal of this dissertation is to show how the concept of authorship Qing scholars employed forced them to face interpretative issues, which they resolved in ways that bear the mark of the social conservatism of the period. The underlying question is how the concept of authorship interacted with an idealized image of antiquity to drive philological research in a direction that distinguishes the scholarship of the mid-Qing from other periods.

I have already laid out how Qing scholars started their research with the assumption that every early Chinese text was produced by one author. When this narrow concept of authorship reached its limits because it did not allow space for differing voices within a work, scholars were forced to decide which of these voices belonged to the legitimate author (the creator of the content), and which represented additions by other contributors. The scarcity of external evidence turned this issue into a question of interpretation. Scholars could only rely on what

they believed the legitimate author would have said to distinguish genuine from spurious. This, however, proved to be a highly subjective criterion.

A pattern emerges when we scrutinize the ways Qing scholars legitimized or devalued the different voices in a single text. In the most general terms, they usually thought highly of the figure whose name graced the title page and blamed his followers for the shortcomings and cruder passages within the text. As my case study of Confucius and the *Analects* shows, the standards scholars applied to Confucius's words and behavior correlate closely with the social conservatism of the Qing dynasty.

The prominent role of interpretative issues and the preconceptions about the correct behavior of the sages of antiquity shows that Qing evidential learning was neither impartial nor objective. Rather, it constituted a scholarly discourse that remained within the boundaries of a classical interpretation that was centered on Confucius. Scholars defended his character with the philological tools at their disposal and assigned other received texts a place in an intellectual genealogy they arranged around him.[25] Ori Sela has recently pointed out that the discussions Qing scholars had about other aspects of evidential learning, such as astronomy, were similarly constrained by their need to defend their identity against the perceived threat of Western knowledge.[26] All this throws assessments of evidential learning as unbiased scholarship into question. It is true that the use of evidence played an important role; reliance on evidence alone, however, does not qualify scholarship as objective or impartial. Scholars' assumptions, for example about the behavior of historical figures, influence the direction their research takes. Sometimes they defend those assumptions despite statements in the sources that seem to contradict them, thus reducing evidence to a mere rhetorical device.

Finally, beyond reassessing the intellectual history of late imperial China, this dissertation contributes to the study of philology on a global scale. Recent publications in this burgeoning field duly recognize the importance of Qing China's fully developed philological tradition, yet specialized research remains scarce. While my aim is not to do a comparative study, the significant commonalities between the European and the Chinese practices of philology can serve as a reminder that scholars working in different textual cultures often have to deal with

[25] This intellectual genealogy is independent of the state's efforts to enshrine historical figures in the temples of Confucius. For the latter, see Thomas A. Wilson, *The Genealogy of the Way. The Construction and Uses of the Confucian Tradition in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 60-71.

[26] Sela, *China's Philological Turn*, 150-158. That supposedly universal scientific findings are, after all, not "placeless" but often geographically bound in their production and reception is not unique to China. See David Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place. Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1-5.

the same problems and sometimes find similar solutions. As much as the concrete examples may differ, the ways in which textual researchers approach their sources often serve the purpose of making sense of the writings in light of shared assumptions.

Historical background

To situate this study of textual scholarship undertaken by the elite literati of late imperial China, a cursory overview of the historical circumstances under which they worked is helpful. Three aspects are relevant: Their social standing and working environment, the tradition of textual scholarship they inherited from previous centuries, and the atmosphere of social conservatism that permeated Qing society.

A common explanation for the rapid development of scholarship in Qing times is the large number of men passing the official examinations, who subsequently faced abysmal odds when trying to find a position in the imperial bureaucracy. While the population doubled during the 18th century, the number of official posts stagnated. Passing the civil service examinations remained an important part of elite identity, but the pool of graduates with little prospect of finding employment grew out of proportion, so that even the top candidates had to wait years before being called upon to serve. These highly educated men often turned to scholarship to make a living. This became possible thanks to large-scale collaborative projects initiated by the government and wealthy individuals; these employed dozens, and in some cases hundreds, of educated men. These projects might involve writing local gazetteers, editing and reprinting rare texts, or doing research on ritual.[27] Individual officials sometimes also staffed their "private secretariat" with scholars who were unable to secure another job. These scholars would then either do research or support their employer by ghostwriting the prefaces often requested from prominent officials.[28]

During the Qing, local academies, both state-run and private, were important centers of learning. They attracted various elites, including some officials who gave up their careers long before retirement was due to teach and pursue their own scholarly interests. The number of academies

[27] Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, 100-112.

[28] Prefaces by well-known scholars added to the prestige of any publication, thus the fame of some led to a situation where they received too many requests to handle on their own. Ironically, in an age that problematized the authorship of received texts, who owned these prefaces became an issue as well: Was it the patron in whose name it was written, or the actual writer? See Mizukami Masaharu 水上 雅晴, "Ch'ing Scholarship and Private Secretariats. With a Focus on Compilatory Publications and Proxy Writing," in *Acta Asiatica*, no. 110, 2016,77-98.

grew exponentially, supported by funding from the state.[29] Comparable to the projects mentioned above, academies enabled literati to focus on scholarship, a development that fostered specialization. Closely associated with an income and expertise, scholarship was more than an idle pastime. Scholars were expected by their colleagues to maintain certain standards, among which a thorough command of the sources ranked high.

With these economic and professional supports, scholars who had already mastered the classics according to the standards set by the civil service examinations could stay abreast of the latest trends in scholarship. For many, reliance on the institutional framework of scholarly projects and academies was a necessity in the face of dwindling prospects for official appointment. For others, it allowed them the freedom to follow their passion for learning. Regardless of individual motivations, the circumstances of the mid-Qing proved fertile ground for specialized scholarship.

As for the concrete content of their research, Qing scholars were not the first to question the author ascriptions of received texts. Writings by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) already contain mature insights into the textual history of a number of early works, preceding the Qing developments by a thousand years. Similarly, Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279) scholars voiced increased skepticism concerning traditional author ascriptions and made numerous attempts to change the classics.[30] One can already find many of the approaches that became prevalent in the Qing in these earlier discussions, and the arguments brought forward did not change drastically over time. What sets the Qing apart is the fact that these debates rest on a much broader foundation, with more scholars offering a wider range of opinions.

Qing scholars were aware of the long history of Chinese textual studies. To a certain degree, they kept a dialog with that past alive, using quotes of earlier assessments to either refute certain arguments or support their own judgments. However, explicit engagement remained sporadic, especially at higher levels of abstraction, with the exception of a few key issues: The doubts scholars since the Song and Yuan 元 (1279-1368) dynasties had expressed about the *Documents* reverberated in Qing debates, while the rearrangements and novel author ascriptions proposed by adherents of "learning of the Way" (*daoxue* 道學) continued to cause controversy. In general,

[29] The cases of academies in Guangzhou 廣州 described by Steven Miles can illustrate how academies functioned in the Qing. See Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning. Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006), esp. 74-84 and chapter 3.

[30] Ye Guoliang 葉國良, *Songren yijing gaijing kao* 宋人疑經改經考 (Study of Doubting and Changing the Classics in the Song) (Taibei: Taiwan daxue chuban weiyuanhui, 1980).

Qing scholars did not see themselves as radically breaking with their predecessors, with perhaps the exception of the Ming 明 (1368-1644), an era in which real learning was seen to have been in short supply. They acknowledged working within a long tradition but directed their attention to debating each other. The dichotomy of Han learning versus Song learning did not play a decisive role in the period under discussion here; that aspect only gained currency in the early 19th century and, in my opinion, distracts more from issues at the center of scholarly discourse than it is conducive to understanding them.[31]

Beyond textual scholarship and the study of authorship, evidential learning encompassed a wide range of disciplines and areas of research, and these activities rested on a much broader social base since they attracted many literati. In this key respect developments in the Qing contrasted sharply with earlier periods. Outside their study chambers, scholars began to survey the world around them, describing localities, the people who lived there and their customs. Historical monuments drew attention, especially when they bore an inscription, and this interest advanced the development of epigraphy. Scholars traveled far and wide to make rubbings of inscriptions, which were then collected and verified against other sources. Familiarity with earlier scripts and character variants was required for such undertakings. Scholars also recognized the value of arcane subjects such as mathematics and astronomy, both in their application to contemporary problems and in their historical aspects. The latter led to the re-publication of relevant old texts.[32] Finally, historical phonology made great strides as scholars focused their energy on reconstructing historical Chinese pronunciations and rhyme groups. Evidential scholarship had a wide-ranging influence on what Qing literati did and how they did it.

The advances in scholarship in Qing China did not go by unnoticed in neighboring countries. In Joseon Korea, Kim Chŏnghŭi 김정희 (Ch. 金正喜, 1786-1856) was prominent among those who promoted "practical learning" (*silhak* 실학, Ch. *shixue* 實學). Visiting China in 1809, Kim met with such men of distinction as Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733-1818) and Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849), and in 1816 wrote "An explanation of searching what is correct in the actual facts" (*silsa gusi sŏl* 실사구시설, Ch. *shishi qiushi shuo* 實事求是說), referencing a central motto of evidential studies.[33] In 19th-century Nguyen Vietnam, scholars kept track of the latest

[31] Cf. also the critique in Sela, *China's Philological Turn*, 11.
[32] Minghui Hu, *China's Transition to Modernity. The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 2015), 20.
[33] See Ko Chaeuk 고재욱, "Kim Chŏnghŭi ŭi silhak sasang gwa ch'ŏngdae kojŭnghak" 金正喜의 實學思想과 清代 考證學 (Kim Chŏnghŭi's silhak Thought and Qing Evidential Scholarship)," in *Tae-dong Yearly Review of Classics*, no. 10, 1993, 737-748. I thank Kanghun Ahn for bringing this to my attention.

developments in gazetteer writing and confidently challenged the Chinese written record where their local knowledge contradicted it.[34]

The case of Japan was made more complex by the fact that for some Japanese, the Manchu conquest had proven that Japan was the superior culture[35] and the forming of a nativist movement later labeled "national learning" (*kokugaku* 国学, Ch. *guoxue*) that looked down on all things Chinese. Proponents claimed, for example, to have deciphered the original Japanese language behind the Chinese characters used in the earliest Japanese texts.[36] Despite circumstances so unconducive to the reception of Chinese scholarship, books on evidential learning still found an admiring audience among Japanese classicists.[37]

Even though Chinese scholars produced some of the most advanced scholarship of the time, whose fame radiated beyond the borders of the Qing Empire, the writings they published still carried the imprint of the time and place where they produced them. The Qing government and local literati propagated values and standards of correct behavior centered on "filial devotion, loyalty to the monarch, and wifely fidelity."[38] In line with these values, in Beijing it banned forms of dramas that "employed colloquial language, lewd innuendoes and relied on seductive female impersonators in starring roles."[39] My discussion will focus on the area that has received the most scholarly attention and is thus best documented, namely, the purity of women, located at the intersection of ritual and sexuality. Besides conveying the conservative atmosphere that permeated Qing society, scholars of the time inserted the strict separation of the sexes current at that time into the texts they researched.

Qing dynasty legislation and cultural activities, especially beginning with the Yongzheng 雍正 reign (1723-1735), displayed an "anxiety over female chastity."[40] Widespread literati concern with female chastity began in the late Ming, yet it was during the Yongzheng reign that the state

[34] Kathlene Baldanze, "Books without Borders: Phạm Thận Duật (1825–1885) and the Culture of Knowledge in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Vietnam," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 77, no. 3, 2018, 713–40.
[35] Benjamin Elman, "Sinophiles and Sinophobes in Tokugawa Japan. Politics, Classicism, and Medicine during the Eighteenth Century," in *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: an International Journal*, vol. 2, 2008, 97-99.
[36] Susan Burns, *Before the Nation. Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 69.
[37] Elman, "Sinophiles and Sinophobes in Tokugawa Japan," 106f.
[38] Chow, *Confucian Ritualism*, 3.
[39] Harriet Zurndorfer, "Han-hsüeh, 'Evidential Research,' and Female Chastity: A Re-examination of Intellectual Attitudes and Social Ideals in 18th Century China," in Wilt Idema and Erik Zürcher (eds.), *Thought and Law in Qin and Han China. Studies Presented to Anthony Hulsewé on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 211.
[40] Matthew Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 10.

assumed a prominent controlling and centralizing function in this drive.[41] On the one hand, it extended elite norms of behavior to the whole population, which meant that prostitution and extra-marital intercourse were proscribed.[42] On the other hand, both the central government and the local power holders expanded the celebration of virtuous female conduct. This led to the construction of arches for faithful widows who, no matter how old or young, did not remarry after their husband's death. Local gazetteers honored the many who gave their lives in defense of their virtue in a special section on exemplary women.[43] While men still could take concubines, a woman was limited to one sexual partner over her whole life, guarded by the institution of marriage. Women had to fight off anyone who threatened their chastity, ideally leaving physical traces of the struggle. Anything less and they too would be punished for consensual illicit intercourse if their case was brought to court.[44]

This widespread and intensive concern with female chastity made its way into scholarly research. We can see this in the reception history of the highly regarded female poet Li Qingzhao 李清照 (late 11th to mid-12th c.) in the early 19th century. After losing her husband in 1129, she was married to another man for a short time. While this had been a stain on her reputation ever since, scholars had never doubted the fact that the marriage had taken place. Knowledge of the remarriage coexisted with admiration of her poetry. Once Qing scholars got involved, they used their philological skills to erase the second marriage from the record to restore Li's good name. Different theories were proposed, and their authors forcefully disputed each other's reasoning. Whether they argued that the inferior style of the passages mentioning the marriage gave them away as corruptions or that the name of the husband was intentionally changed to slander Li Qingzhao, all shared "the a priori conviction that Li Qingzhao could not have remarried."[45] These scholars, it seems, were unable to square the literary talent they recognized in Li with her supposedly immoral life choices and set out to sanitize her image by questioning the records of her behavior. In a related development, her category in local gazetteers shifted from a literary figure to an exemplary woman.[46]

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[41] Siyen Fei, "Writing for Justice. An Activist Beginning of the Cult of Female Chastity in Late Imperial China," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 71, no. 4, 2012, 991-1012.
[42] Ibid, 9-10.
[43] Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," in *Past & Present*, no. 104, 1984, 111-152. Susan Mann, *Precious Records. Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997).
[44] Vivien Ng, "Ideology and Sexuality: Rape Laws in Qing China," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1987, 57-70.
[45] Ronald Egan, *The Burden of Female Talent. The Poet Li Qingzhao and Her History in China* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013), 277. I thank Wilt Idema for bringing this to my attention.
[46] Ibid, 279-80.

The pressure to read current values back into the textual heritage shines through most prominently in Qing studies of the life and deeds of Confucius. As my first chapter shows, a concern with the high ethical standards Confucius was supposed to embody affected his portrayal at all levels. And once a woman entered the picture, the stakes became even higher. Thus, the episode where Confucius meets Nanzi 南子, the wife of a contemporary ruler, was subjected to a rigorous philological treatment that showed the text could not be trusted. As they explained the story away, scholars showed that for them, preservation of meaning took precedence over preservation of the text. In the charged atmosphere of the Qing, no ambiguity in the behavior of the sage was tolerable if he was to retain his status. While this aspect did not affect all areas of research equally, it was enough of a factor to direct the attention of scholars to certain issues, and to influence the results of their research.

Content and structure

This dissertation consists of four chapters, each of which focuses on a different aspect of the concept of authorship. The first chapter studies how Qing scholars evaluated the authority of the *Analects*. They all agreed that Confucius's disciples produced the text and that the disciples' claim to authority hinged on their link to Confucius. In discussions on this topic, the challenges generated by the narrow concept of authorship unfolded in all their nuances because of the centrality of the *Analects*. As they coped with these challenges, scholars had to decide which passages they could still trust, and to justify their choices to critical colleagues. The second chapter looks at attempts to develop a model of authorship that corresponds more closely with the peculiar features of the received texts, such as different textual layers and traces of accumulation over time. I follow the application of the narrow model of authorship to the point where scholars started to realize its limitations and analyze a contemporary theory that proposed a broader concept of authorship. With few exceptions, overcoming the narrow concept of authorship remained inconsequential in Qing discussions. And even those exceptions highlight the tenacity of tradition in the face of philological challenges.

The third chapter traces how the need to assign a singular author to each work led to the fashioning of biographies and establishing individual characteristics for important author-figures. The biographical material scholars created shows the importance of identifying a tangible historical author-figure that could anchor the text in Chinese intellectual history. The author-figure that resulted from a scholar's choice and treatment of biographical episodes functioned as an encapsulation of his interpretation of the text. An analysis of how the textual

operations of Qing scholars fit in with the theoretical pronouncements about evidential learning is the focus of chapter four. Critics identified the gap between theory and practice when they questioned the interpretative choices textual scholars invariably had to make in their research. The contemporary discussions around this issue point towards the limits of objectivity that critics and practitioners alike were aware of. This dissertation thus explores the tensions present in the development of philology in China. In my conclusion, I offer preliminary observations about the role of authorship in philology during the early modern period on a more abstract level. There, I take contemporary European trends into account in the hope of offering new perspectives from which to study a field of learning that has profoundly shaped how we see the past.

1. **The cracks in the texture: Authorship and authority of the *Analects***

Praise

When Herr K. heard that he was praised by former students, he said:

"After the students have long forgotten the mistakes of the master,

he himself still remembers them."[47]

Bertolt Brecht

Compared to many other pre-imperial texts, the question of authorship of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) seems very straightforward, thanks to the "Treatise on Literature" (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志) in the *Book of the [Former] Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), completed in the early second century of the common era. According to this account,[48] the *Analects* was compiled by unidentified disciples (*menren* 門人) of Confucius 孔子 (traditional dating 551-479 BCE). They had each written down what they heard the master say or what was spoken among each other, and after Confucius passed away, they combined their notes and turned that into the work called *Analects*.[49] This account formed the basis of virtually all Qing 清 (1644-1912) discussions on the *Analects*. The only modification was that at least since the Tang 唐 (618-907), doubts had been raised whether "disciples" in this case really referred to first-generation disciples. Afterwards, the majority of scholars considered the *Analects* to be a product of second-generation disciples (more on this below).

Since Qing scholars assumed that they were reading the notes of the disciples, it was necessary to justify why the words of the disciples should be as authoritative as the words of Confucius

[47] Das Lob: Als Herr K. hörte, daß er von früheren Schülern gelobt wurde, sagte er: "Nachdem die Schüler schon längst die Fehler des Meisters vergessen haben, erinnert er selbst sich noch immer daran." Bertolt Brecht, *Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), 41.

[48] *Hanshu* 漢書 (*Book of the [Former] Han*), "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 (Treatise on Literature) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 30.1717.

[49] That this account is not entirely trustworthy is clear from the fact that quotations of Confucius in other early texts hardly ever match passages from the received *Analects*. So, at the very least, the *Analects* we have now are not the product of Confucius's disciples. For a substantial treatment of this question and some of the others that are discussed in this chapter, see John Makeham, "The formation of Lunyu as a Book," in *Monumenta Serica* 44.1996, 1-24. This article argues for a date between 150 and 140 BCE as most likely for the completion of the *Analects* as we know them today. For a recent take on this thesis and the different narratives about Confucius that preceded the *Analects*, see Michael Hunter, *Confucius beyond the Analects* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). For a discussion about the ramifications of the textual history for our understanding of the *Analects*, see Michael Hunter and Martin Kern (eds.), *Confucius and the* Analects *Revisited. New Perspectives on Composition, Dating, and Authorship* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

himself. The argument put forward in response was that the disciples of Confucius merely recounted the teachings of their master. To Qing scholars, the disciples were translucent links in the chain of transmission who did not alter the slightest bit what they had learned. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss how Qing scholars defended this position.

The same passage in the *Book of the [Former] Han* also mentions three different recensions of the *Analects* that had been in circulation during the early years of the Han 漢 dynasty (202 BCE – 9 CE). These were the *Old Text Analects* (*Gu Lun* 古論), a version written in an old script, and two regional traditions called Qi-*Analects* (*Qi Lun* 齊論) and Lu-*Analects* (*Lu Lun* 魯論), named after the states in which they were supposedly transmitted.[50] All of them were said to employ slightly different chapter arrangements. These traditions disappeared after Zhang Yu 張禹 (d. 5 BCE) created his own version of the *Analects*, possibly a hybrid of the recensions from Qi and Lu.[51] Scholars in the Qing invoked these recensions in order to illustrate why a certain local color showed through in the final version of the text. In a remarkable diachronic exchange that spans two centuries, scholars of the late Ming 明 (1368-1644) and the Qing pondered why Confucius would have praised the virtue of Guan Zhong 管仲 (active 7th century BCE). Most agreed that this was due to the influence of disciples from the state of Qi, where Guan Zhong had been a high official in government. For those who employed this approach, the disciples were necessarily not translucent, but rather had to be reckoned with as agents with their own agenda. The discussion about this topic is at the center of the second section.

The view that the editors of the *Analects* had their own interests was taken to extremes by a small minority in the scholarly community. Proponents of this view did not consider the *Analects* a faithful repository of Confucius teachings. Rather, their goal was to detect the distortions that were introduced into this work by its editors. These scholars were treading on thin ice: They challenged the authority of the *Analects*, widely considered the most authoritative collection of Confucius's teachings, by harking back to the authority of Confucius. In other words, due to their highly idealized image of Confucius, the *Analects* were not Confucian

[50] For the continuing grip that this framework has on our scholarly imagination, one only needs to take a look at the buzz that the excavation of a bamboo strip with the characters *zhi dao* 智道 (knowing the way) on the verso side has generated. The *Book of the [Former] Han* lists those characters in connection with the Qi-version, which led the authors of the initial excavation report to propose that they had found a fragment of this elusive *Analects*-recension. For an evaluation of this proposal and the larger discussion that ensued, see Charles Sanft, "Questions about the Qi *Lunyu*," in *T'oung Pao*, vol. 104, no. 1-2, 2018, 189-194.
[51] Makeham, "The formation of Lunyu as a Book," 23.

enough for their taste. In the third section of this chapter, I analyze how they philologically defended this claim.

The main question of this chapter is how the narrow concept of authorship manifested itself in scholarly treatments of the *Analects*. The fact that this work was not authored by Confucius in the full sense of the word created an aura of uncertainty around it. Scholars dealt with this uncertainty by strengthening the authority of the actual authors – the disciples of Confucius – or by dissecting the text in order to identify and remove their contributions.

Negligible editorship: Disciples that transmit but do not create

The *Analects* has been an important text in China since the Han dynasty and the subject of a large number of commentaries.[52] It was considered a classic since the Tang. Since the Southern Song 宋 (1127-1279), it was part of the Four Books (*si shu* 四書) that soon began to outshine the other canonical classics.[53] All this time, readers agreed that this was a collection put together by the disciples of Confucius, not by the master himself, but this gap in the transmission history was not problematized. The only aspect of *Analects*-authorship that did generate discussion was which disciples were behind the compilation. Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) argued that the editors were not direct disciples, but second-generation disciples of Confucius.[54] This assessment was followed by Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200).[55] There is little indication that for mainstream scholars, this posed any challenge to the authority of the received text.

Against the backdrop of the narrowing of the concept of authorship that took place in the Qing, however, this gap in the transmission history required an explanation. It no longer went without saying that if Confucius did not in fact author the *Analects*, the text could still faithfully reflect

[52] The four most prominent ones are discussed in John Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators. Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003).
[53] Daniel Gardner, *Zhu Xi's Reading of the Analects. Canon, Commentary and the Classical Tradition* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 1-3.
[54] Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, „Lunyu bian er pian" 論語辯二篇 (Two Essays Examining the *Analects*), in Yi Xinding 易新鼎 and Mu Gengcai 母庚才 (eds.), *Liu Zongyuan ji* 柳宗元集 (Collection of Liu Zongyuan) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2000), 61-62.
[55] "Lunyu xu shuo" 論語序說 (Prefatory Comments on the *Analects*) in Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Collected Commentaries to the Chapters and Verses of the Four Books) (Taibei: Changan chubanshe, 1991), 43.

his teachings. It was Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804), towering giant of 18th-century evidential studies, who provided this explanation.

In a passage in the question-and-answer format (*da wen* 答問), an interlocutor wonders why scholars in the past consistently misattributed *Analects*-quotations to Confucius when in fact the sentence in question had been uttered by disciples. The interlocutor, who is probably only a rhetorical device instead of an actual person, closes his display of examples from official histories with the astonished question:

> The *Analects* is not an obscure work, whence such errors?[56]
>
> 《論語》非僻書，何以舛謬乃爾？

This question touches on two concerns: First, everyone knows the *Analects*. Indeed, in the period when this question was asked, every scholar who aspired to a certain status knew the *Analects* by heart, because the understanding of this work was frequently tested in the first session of the official examinations.[57] Every serious scholar should have been able to recognize such a mistake instantly, and even those with a less reliable memory would probably have had quick and easy access to an edition to check. To the interlocutor, such an egregious mistake seems all but inconceivable. Second, such misattributions are *mistakes*. For the questioner, there exists a clear distinction between Confucius and his disciples, which those who quote a line from the *Analects* have to respect.

Qian Daxin begins his explication of this riddle by giving even more examples of quotes from disciples that have been wrongly ascribed to Confucius. But it is not that those who did so were lacking in their scholarship. They did not even commit an error:

> But does this indeed mean that people in the past erred a lot? No. The "Treatise on Literature" in the *Book of the [Former] Han* states: "The *Analects* consists of the words of Confucius answering to his disciples and other contemporaries, and what the disciples discussed among themselves and heard from the master." Therefore, in quoting the

[56] Qian Daxin 錢大昕, "Da wen liu" 答問六 (Answering Questions, Section Six), in *Qianyan tang ji* 潛研堂集 (Collection from the Hall of Focused Research), in Chen Wenhe 陳文和 (ed.), *Jiading Qian Daxin quanji* 嘉定錢大昕全集 (Complete Collection of Qian Daxin from Jiading) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), vol. 9, 124.
[57] In the first session, a line from one of the Four Books was given, of which the *Analects* is one. The examinee had to provide the complete passage and spell out its implications. Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 273.

Analects, Confucians of the Han and the Tang traced the utterances back to Confucius, even when they had been spoken by disciples.[58]

然則古人固多誤乎？非也。《漢・藝文志》云：“《論語》者，孔子應答弟子時人及弟子相與言而接聞於夫子之語也。”故漢、唐諸儒引用《論語》，雖弟子之言，皆歸之孔子。

Qian explains the practice of assigning the words of disciples to Confucius by quoting the seminal passage on the formation of the *Analects* from the *Book of the [Former] Han*. It is not immediately clear, however, why he responds the way he does. The passage states that the "disciples discuss among themselves" (弟子相與言), with no reference to Confucius, who is explicitly removed from the scene. Taken at face value, this statement indicates that parts of the *Analects* consist of discussions between the disciples in which Confucius was not involved. One possible reading of this, then, is that besides Confucius, there are other, independent voices present in the text. Qian Daxin, however, confidently asserts that quoting these statements as dicta of Confucius is fully justified.

Qian gives the first clue for understanding his position at the end of his answer, when he says of the disciples whose utterances have been assigned to Confucius in the past that "they had all heard these words from the master."[59] In other contexts, Qian Daxin makes his case along similar lines of reasoning. He declares, for example, that a specific passage of the *Analects* consists "completely of words with which Zixia [a disciple of Confucius] transmits what he has heard, not a single utterance has been created by him."[60] For Qian, who argues in defense of the passage, this does not indicate a lack of creativity, but rather faithful adherence to what Zixia has learned from Confucius.

Qian Daxin was not only proud of his theory, he was also in the position to force others to engage with it. When drafting the policy question (*ce wen* 策問) for an unspecified civil service examination,[61] he built it around the idea developed in the answer to the interlocutor. The opening sentences set the tone for the question and lay out in detail why Qian considers it unproblematic to draw no distinction between the words of Confucius and those of the disciples:

[58] Qian Daxin, "Da wen liu," 124.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid, 121.
[61] In the Qing, these questions were notorious for being convoluted and exceeding the answers expected from examinees in length. See Elman, *Cultural History*, 447.

> The *Analects* consist of the subtle words of Confucius that the disciples have recorded. Within the work, there are also parts that originate from the disciples, but these [utterances] too have to respect what [the disciples] have heard [from Confucius] and cannot go against the principles of the sage.[62]
>
> 《論語》一書，弟子所記孔子之微言。間有出於諸弟子者，亦必尊其所聞而不戾乎聖人之旨者也。

Qian goes on to compare utterances by Ziyou 子游 and Zigong 子貢, disciples of Confucius, and Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077), a Song dynasty philosopher, to things Confucius himself said to show that they are in accordance with each other. The point is to make clear that even though something may not have been uttered by Confucius himself, the fact that it comes from the mouth of a faithful disciple is sufficient to guarantee its validity. Negatively put, Qian denies the disciples any agency. Whatever they said, they were acting as the mouthpieces of their teacher. Given such a close and almost symbiotic relationship, there is no need for later generations of readers to distinguish the words of the disciples from those of the master.

The examinee, who has his task set out for him in such detail, is finally asked to consider this problem:

> If one looks for the flaws in single words, then there is much that is debatable in the six classics. What do you gentlemen think about this?[63]
>
> 求疵於一言之間，六經之可議者多矣。諸生以為何如？

Besides being an almost stereotypical case of an examination question that is its own answer, this links what began in Qian's writings as an *Analects*-issue to the entirety of the six classics. Qian Daxin's effort to keep the established wisdom of the *Analects* intact becomes understandable against the background of the narrow concept of authorship that forced scholars to reconsider author ascriptions. The foil for his argument are scholars who may have acknowledged the authority of Confucius, but not that of the disciples. This not only implies that everything contained in the *Analects* that is not an utterance of Confucius himself has lost its value, but that the whole text has only a tenuous, indirect link to a source of authority: As a product of the disciples, it is only authoritative as long as the disciples faithfully transmit the teachings of Confucius. This is what Qian Daxin's argument asserts with a heavy hand by

[62] Qian Daxin, "Ce wen" 策問 (Policy Questions), in Chen Wenhe (ed.), *Qianyan tang ji*, 268.
[63] Ibid.

postulating complete correspondence between the learning of the disciples and the principles of Confucius. Qian assumed completely static traditions in which learning was being perfectly conserved and handed down from generation to generation.

This argument was warmly received by posterity. Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩 (1744-1819), who wrote a short entry in his notes in which he struggled with the very same issue of seemingly misattributed quotations, cites Qian's solution to the conundrum and calls it "exceedingly clear and comprehensive" (*ji ming tong* 極明通).[64] Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842-1917), the prolific late-Qing philologist, also included it in his commentary on the *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書).[65] Taking the larger Qing discourse on the *Analects* into account, however, Qian's was a lone voice, supported only by a few scholars from later generations. It was not the case that anyone explicitly took issue with it. But if his argument had been persuasive, there would not have been a need for textual scholarship on the *Analects* that tries to isolate the influence of specific disciples, because according to Qian, the individual disciple did not have a view that differed from that of Confucius. The majority of contemporary scholars who discussed the reliability of the *Analects* thought otherwise, and their views will be discussed in the next two sections.

Layered texts discussing layered texts: How disciples from the state of Qi shaped the *Analects*

In two consecutive passages in the 14th chapter of the *Analects*, Confucius praises Guan Zhong, minister of the state of Qi.[66] Some Qing scholars considered such praise excessive, especially in light of another passage in chapter 3 of the *Analects*, in which Confucius calls the "capacity" of Guan Zhong "small" (*qi xiao* 器小)[67] and Confucius's general restraint in complimenting the humaneness (*ren* 仁) of others. The fact that a Qi-recension (i.e. the state where Guan Zhong was active) of the *Analects* is mentioned in the *Book of the [Former] Han*,[68] and that records

[64] Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩, *Pie ji* 瞥記 (Notes Taken after Perusing), 3.20b in *Congshu jicheng xubian* 叢書集成續編 (Extended Compilation of the Complete Collection of Collectanea) (Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1989), vol. 22, 719. The preface to the note collection is dated to 1798.
[65] Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Hou Hanshu jijie* 後漢書集解 (Collected Explanations of the Book of the Later Han) (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1968), vol. 10-2, 133.
[66] *Analects* 14.16 and 17. A third passage, 14.9, also discusses Guan Zhong but is not as laudatory.
[67] *Analects* 3.22.
[68] *Hanshu*, 30.1716.

existed that linked disciples to that state, gave scholars the opportunity to question philologically whether Confucius's word of praise were genuine.[69]

Intellectual historians of China have long pointed out that despite contemporary and later attempts to portray Qing developments as a break with those of the Ming, there are many aspects that bear witness to a continuity between the two.[70] The discussion about Confucius's praise for Guan Zhong is a very concrete example of such a continuity. A passage on this issue from the collected works of the Ming scholar Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550-1612), one of the founders of the Donglin 東林 academy, was picked up by Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (1717-1796) in the Qing and approvingly connected to the arguments of another Qing scholar, Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1798). A contemporary of both, Sun Zhizu 孫志祖 (1737-1801), took issue with their theories, which were finally rejected in the first half of the 19th century by Shen Tao 沈濤 (c. 1792-1855).

Besides what this case can tell us about the authority of the *Analects*, it is interesting because it illustrates the style of cumulative research practiced during the Qing.[71] The tendency among scholars was to disclose the provenance of a piece of information, in order to make clear whose work they were building on. They often did this by placing a quotation at the beginning of their text. The rest of the text then discusses the view expressed in the quotation. For the reader, this practice is convenient because it introduces the topic and stakes out the position that the author engages. When the next contributor joined the debate, he had the option to retain both the original quote and the gist of the previous discussion. In this way, the first part of his text became a survey history of the debate thus far. While this approach to writing enhanced transparency, excessive use sometimes leaves the reader with a sense of information overkill.

In order to give a better sense of the structure of the debate, Figure 1 illustrates how the texts build upon each other. Solid arrows show who quoted whom; dotted lines indicate reference.

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[69] Hu Chusheng has argued that scholars who lived through the Ming-Qing transition still felt highly sympathetic towards these words of praise because they associated Guan Zhong with the establishment of clear distinctions between the Chinese and the barbarians. I do not agree with his assessment, however, that their experiences during the Manchu conquest enabled them to *correctly* understand these passages. By the late 18th century, which Hu does not mention, scholars seem to have forgotten about that discourse and looked at the stories from the perspective of Confucius's high standards in evaluating people. Cf. Hu Chusheng 胡楚生, "Qingchu zhuru lun Guan Zhong bu si Zijiu shenyi" 清初諸儒論'管仲不死子糾'申義 (An Interpretation of the Discussions of Early-Qing Confucians about Guan Zhong Not Dying for Zijiu), in idem, *Qingdai xueshushi yanjiu* 清代學術史研究 (Studies on the History of Qing Scholarship) (Taibei: Xuesheng shuju, 1993), 125-139.

[70] Yü Ying-shih, "Some Preliminary Observations on the Rise of Ch'ing Confucian Intellectualism," in *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1-2, 1975, 110-116.

[71] Cf. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, 204-221.

Scholars inside the box share the assumption that the Qi-recension of the *Analects* can explain why the received *Analects* contains positive remarks about Guan Zhong, while those outside of criticize them for that assumption. Sun Zhizu reacts to the argument shared by Yuan Mei and Lu Wenchao without explicitly mentioning any of them; Shen Tao reacts to the whole discussion that preceded him.

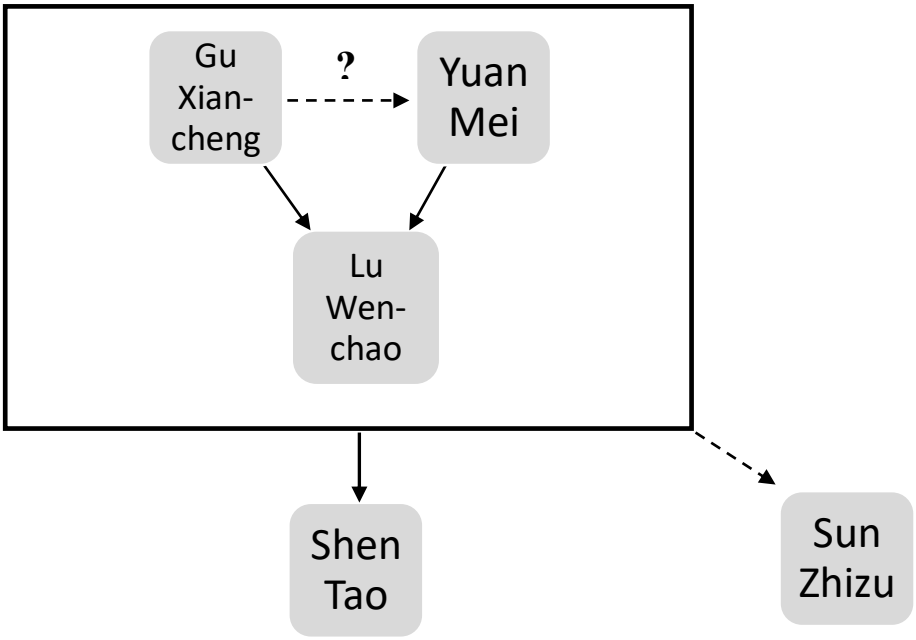

Figure 1: Flowchart of scholars involved in the debate over Confucius's praise for Guan Zhong

The starting point: Gu Xiancheng

It all started with a discussion between Gu Xiancheng and his younger brother Gu Yuncheng 顧允成 (1554-1607, style [*zi* 字] Jishi 季時). As recorded in an essay collected in the works of Gu Xiancheng:

> I said to Jishi: "I recently read the two passages in which Confucius assesses the humaneness of Guan Zhong with Zilu and Zigong and found them highly questionable. In praising [the sage emperor] Shun, Confucius only said "no flaw" twice; in praising Yan [Yuan, normally portrayed as Confucius most promising disciple], he said "Worthy!" twice. Now in this case he says "How humane he was!" twice about [Guan]

Zhong, when throughout his life Confucius never casually granted someone the label of humaneness, which he here in this singular instance grants Zhong. How can that be?"[72]

予謂季時："頃讀孔子與子路、子貢評管仲二條，殊可疑。孔子僅於贊禹兩言"無間然"，於贊顏兩言"賢哉"。今於仲亦兩言"如其仁"，且仁之一字生平未嘗漫以許人而獨許仲，何也。

The basis for Gu Xiancheng's argumentation is that the behavior of Confucius in the passages where he praises Guan Zhong is not compatible with his behavior in other parts of the *Analects*. In the other parts, which Gu defines as the rule, Confucius is sparing in his compliments. Even the mythical sage emperor Shun is only said to have "no flaw," a statement that does not explicitly link Shun to any positive quality, and Confucius's favorite disciple Yan Yuan is "worthy," a quality that ranks lower than humaneness. That Guan Zhong should outrank these two figures is inconceivable to Gu Xiancheng.

Gu makes his case in a way that is typical for many applications of textual scholarship: The reader has formed expectations concerning the protagonist after a set of passages that share certain characteristics. Assuming that the work in question is coherent, the reader finds his expectations thwarted by other passages where these characteristics are turned on their head.[73] Under such circumstances, the original assumption of a coherent work can only be sustained if other factors are taken into account. The protagonist could have evolved, for example. This pushes the issue toward questions of literature and narrative theory. For the philologist, the figure that concerns me here, the conclusion is usually that the text contains different layers that are at odds with each other.

The next step is to determine which behavior of the protagonist is to be considered the rule, and which the exception. Gu Xiancheng favors the Confucius for whom humaneness is a virtue that few can claim to possess, and who is restrained in his praise for others accordingly, over the Confucius who commends liberally. If this is the rule, how does one explain the exception? Gu Xiancheng's younger brother provides him with an answer:

[72] Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成, *Gu Duan Wengong yishu* 顧端文公遺書 (Works Bequeathed by Gu Xiancheng), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 943, 190/12.2a-b.

[73] This perspective is based on the discussion of reading expectations in Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1976), esp. 193-204.

> Jishi said: "I suspect that these are exaggerated words of people from Qi that have been attributed to Confucius. In the past, the Lu-recension of the *Analects* and the Qi-recension of the *Analects* have been transmitted. Maybe the Qi-recension has made its way into the Lu-recension, there is no way to know. Saying that [this statement] originates from Confucius seems to be wrong."[74]
>
> 季時曰："此恐是齊人張大之辭而託於孔子耳。舊傳有《魯論語》、《齊論語》；或《齊論語》竄入《魯論語》中，未可知也。謂出自孔子，似乎不然。"

Gu Yuncheng shares the suspicion of his brother that the statement about Guan Zhong being humane is out of character for Confucius. It makes perfect sense to him, however, as praise coming from someone from Qi, where Guan Zhong had been active and supposedly was fondly remembered. Not much is known about the Qi-recension of the *Analects* beyond the fact that it once existed, some Han dynasty links in its chain of transmission, and a few variant characters retained in early commentaries. As Gu Yuncheng pieces the information together, its connection to Qi implies that disciples coming from that place have been able to include some local color, which manifests itself here as a positive remark about Guan Zhong. This passage may then have found its way into the Lu-recension and from there into the hybrid recension that finally eclipsed the other editions. Once that happened, Confucius's praise of Guan Zhong, which would otherwise have remained apocryphal, had become canonical.

Yuan Mei's changing views on the Analects

The discussion between Gu Xiancheng and his brother is the earliest formulation of this problem that Qing scholars picked up in their discussion. The second is the theory that Yuan Mei proposed. Yuan Mei is well known as a literary figure, but his contributions to Qing scholarship, while not entirely ignored,[75] do not receive nearly as much attention. He is, however, often grappling with the very same issues that fuel the research of the most prominent scholars. For example, the question of the reliability of the *Analects* occupied him as well. In a letter to Li Fu 李紱 (1675-1750), who has been called the "most outstanding representative" of

[74] Gu Xiancheng, *Gu Duan Wengong yishu*, 190/12.2a-b.
[75] Jerry D. Schmidt, *Harmony Garden. The Life, Literary Criticism, and Poetry of Yuan Mei (1716-1798)* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 342-346.

the thought of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) in the Qing,[76] Yuan spelled out a very simple solution to this problem:

> The words of Confucius are widely diverging; as for what can be relied on, luckily there is the *Analects*.[77]
>
> 孔子之言又雜矣，今之可信者，賴有《論語》。

In this letter, which must be considered a document of the thought of Yuan's earlier years (the recipient died when Yuan was 34), he acknowledges that there are a wide variety of sayings that have been ascribed to Confucius. They cannot all be authentic, but he puts his faith in the editors of the *Analects*: The content of this work reflects the true teachings of Confucius.

In the course of his life, Yuan seems to have developed a more complex evaluation of the matter. In a long essay called "Four Explanations on the *Analects*" (*Lunyu jie si pian* 論語解四篇) that dissects aspects of the work that require careful consideration in order to not be misunderstood, Confucius's praise of Guan Zhong is the first issue he tackles. Yuan Mei opens the essay by retracting the unconditional faith he had in the *Analects* in his early years:

> It happened often that the various masters of the hundred schools spoke in the name of Confucius. Even in the case of the *Analects,* I cannot be without doubt.[78]
>
> 諸子百家冒孔子之言者多矣。雖《論語》，吾不能無疑焉。

For Yuan, the editors of the *Analects* are no longer the strict gatekeepers that successfully weeded out all sayings that had been wrongly ascribed to Confucius. They have become agents in the creation of the text instead. Without reference to the previous considerations by Gu Xiancheng, Yuan too identifies the disciples by their regional affiliations and refers to the different recensions of the *Analects* that were once transmitted. For Yuan Mei, too, the bone of contention is the fact that Confucius calls Guan Zhong humane even though the master usually

[76] Chin-Shing Huang, *Philosophy, Philology, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century China. Li Fu and the Lu-Wang School Under the Ch'ing* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 1.
[77] Yuan Mei, "Da Li Mutang xiansheng wen san Li shu" 答李穆堂先生問三禮書 (Letter Answering Li Fu's Question Concerning the Three Books of Rites), in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji* 小倉山房文集 (Prose Collection from the Cabin on Little Granary Hill), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1432, 149/15.8a.
[78] Yuan Mei, "Lunyu jie si pian" 論語解四篇 (Four Explanations on the *Analects*), in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, 267/24.8a.

refrains from lavishing such high praise on others. In order to invalidate what cannot be, textual scholarship is brought into play:

> For the *Analects*, there is the difference between the Qi-recension and the Lu-recension. The people of Qi held Guan Zhong in highest esteem, this is what is referred to in [the *Mengzi*-passage where Mengzi says to a disciple] "You truly are a man of Qi! You know about Guan Zhong and Master Yan, and that is all." When Guan Zhong is considered humane, it is the record of disciples from Qi. Therefore, in the passage above [the one where Confucius calls Guan humane], the text says: "Duke Huan of Qi was upright but not crafty." And in a passage below, the text says: "Chen Chengzi killed Duke Jian [of Qi]." If these [passages] are not from the Qi-recension of the *Analects*, then what are they?[79]
>
> 《論語》有《齊論》、《魯論》之分。齊人最尊管仲，所謂"子誠齊人也，知管仲、晏子而已矣。"以管仲為仁者，齊之弟子記之也。故上篇"齊桓公正而不譎"，下篇"陳成子弒簡公"，非《齊論》而何？

Yuan Mei's argument creates a complex intertextual space[80] in which the questionable *Analects*-passage finds its proper place as a relic from a local tradition. The fact that the passage concerns Qi relates it to the account in the *Book of the [Former] Han* about the different recensions. So far, this is nothing new. On top of that, however, Yuan adds corroborating evidence from the *Mengzi*. The passage he quotes, authoritative due to its canonical origin, explicitly points out that the horizon of people from Qi was so limited that all they knew about was Guan Zhong. The conclusion that follows is that even when they set out to record the words of Confucius, disciples that have ties to Qi end up talking about Guan Zhong, hence the praise in the *Analects*-passage in question.

Once Yuan Mei has focused on the influence of affairs related to Qi on the *Analects*, other passages in the same chapter appear in a new light. As Yuan describes it, the dubious passage about Guan Zhong is surrounded by other passages that also make reference to Qi lore, such as the quality of one former ruler or the killing of another. The fact that these passages cluster in one chapter makes it all the more conspicuous, which leads Yuan to the conclusion that these passages originated in the Qi-recension.

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[79] Ibid.

[80] I borrow this term from Susan Burns, *Before the Nation. Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 45.

To round off the picture, Yuan also identifies what the disciples from Lu thought about Guan Zhong: they made Confucius say that his capacity was small. In Lu, then, people found less reason to praise this figure. Yuan Mei points out that this passage is surrounded by others where Confucius interacts with important figures of Lu to provide evidence that the recension from that state made its way into this part of the *Analects*. Finally, Yuan Mei also enlightens the reader what Confucius really thought about Guan Zhong, without his disciples putting words into his mouth, by quoting yet another *Analects*-passage:

> [Confucius said:] He was a man. He took the city of Pian with its 300 families from the clan of Bo, and for the rest of their lives they did not hold a grudge against him.[81]
>
> 人也，奪伯氏駢邑三百，没齒而無怨焉。

After this analysis, the *Analects* emerges as a complex web formed by conflicting agendas. Yuan Mei no longer reads it as a unified work that can be consumed uncritically. Taken in isolation, this conclusion may seem laudable and valuable to a modern reader. In abstracting from the argumentation that led to it, however, the assumptions on which this conclusion is based are obscured. As long as the reader agrees that humaneness is the highest value in the Confucian axiology, that Confucius exercises restraint in praising others, that Guan Zhong consequently does not deserve such praise and that the horizon of the people from Qi is indeed limited to the extent that all they can speak of is Guan Zhong, then the textual operations that Yuan Mei performs are justified. The catalyst, without which probably none of this would have been defendable and thus publishable in the 18th century, was the historical evidence for the existence of a Qi-recension of the *Analects*. All the other arguments Yuan Mei makes are grouped around this point that serves as the backbone of his argumentation.

It is important to keep in mind that this Qi-recension was an unknown entity, as it remains even today. Beyond single characters, it is uncertain where it differed from the other editions. As such, it could be conveniently used to lend support to one's argumentation. This case thus highlights the difficulty of disentangling the use of textual evidence from the guiding assumptions. There is a strong incentive to conceive of the Qi-recension in the way Gu Yuncheng and Yuan Mei did if the goal is to invalidate certain passages in the *Analects* that pertain to this state. If one has different assumptions about what Confucius would and would

[81] Yuan Mei, "Lunyu jie si pian," 267/24.8b. Cf. *Analects* 14.9. Yuan Mei quotes a shortened version of the final sentence of this passage, leaving out the three characters that mean "eating coarse rice" (*fan shu shi* 飯疏食) that are supposed to come after the last comma in the source text.

not say or about the nature of the Qi-recension, arguments like that of Yuan Mei lose their efficacy, situated as they are in the borderland of textual scholarship and interpretation. There were indeed two scholars during the Qing who publicly challenged this line of reasoning because they had a very different conception of the Qi-recension. Their writings will be analyzed after a discussion of an essay by Lu Wenchao, who wrote in strong support of Yuan Mei's thesis.

Lu Wenchao's views on the different Analects*-recensions*

So far, I have presented two very similar theories on the same issue. There is no indication that Yuan Mei had read the work of Gu Xiancheng, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. The question that concerns me here is not whether there was unacknowledged influence of whether the theory of Yuan Mei was not original. Rather, what matters, because it is indicative of the cumulative style of scholarship practiced during the 18th century, is that this similarity did not go by unnoticed, was picked up and the argument bolstered with new insights.

Normally, Lu Wenchao was not the man for the grand questions and grander theories. He had made himself a name as a collator and publisher. Most of the writings included in his collections stick to these fields and the modest issues that come with them, such as variations between different editions. His essay "On Zilu and Zigong doubting the humaneness of Guan Zhong in the *Analects*" (*Lunyu Zilu Zigong yi Guan Zhong fei ren* 《論語》子路、子貢疑管仲非仁) is one of the few exceptions. This may explain why more than a third of it consists of quotations that give the gist of the arguments by Gu Xiancheng and Yuan Mei, while Lu only adds a comment or remark (*an* 案), which is again full of quotations.

In his remark, Lu Wenchao refines the theory of his predecessors and marshals more supporting evidence. The first aspect that he wants to improve is the identification of the authors of the Qi-recension. This had not been an issue for the Gu brothers, and Yuan Mei had only mentioned "disciples from Qi" (*Qi zhi dizi* 齊之弟子) in passing. As already mentioned, there existed scholarship that argued that it was only with the second generation of disciples (i.e. disciples of Confucius's disciples) that the *Analects* came into existence. Lu Wenchao reminds the participants of this discussion of this:

> Wenchao's [=My] comment: [In the *Xunzi* it is said:] "Among the disciples of Confucius, even boys no taller than 5 feet considered it disgraceful to discuss the five earls."[82] The insight of those from Qi among the disciples of Confucius like Zigao and Jici was especially keen; it goes without saying that they should not have had such an opinion [of praising Guan Zhong]. It is said [in the *Book of the [Former] Han*] that "when Confucius was no more, the subtle words broke off; when the seventy disciples passed away, the great meaning became corrupted." The *Analects* has been written down by students, which refers to disciples of disciples, who often included the teachings of their masters. The generation of Xunzi and Wu Qi also originated from among the [disciples of disciples]; the farther it was transmitted, the more of the original teaching was lost, and it is for this reason that there are such disparate and impure discussions.[83]
>
> 文弨案："孔子之門，五尺童子羞稱五伯。"齊人在聖門者若子羔、季次諸人見地特高，亦不應有此理，固。謂"仲尼沒而微言絕，七十子喪而大義乖"，《論語》蓋門人所記，乃弟子之弟子也，故往往附載其師之說。荀卿、吳起之儔亦出其中，流愈遠而失其真，故有此雜而不純之論。

In this dense quote full of references to important sources about the history of Confucius and his disciples, Lu Wenchao follows the trail set by Yuan Mei: If disciples with ties to Qi have influenced the *Analects*, it should be possible to identify them using the available records. Specifically, Lu bases himself on the *School Sayings of Confucius* (*Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語), a work of that lists the regional affiliation of many disciples in the chapter "Explanation on the 72 disciples" (*Qishier dizi jie* 七十二弟子解), even where no such information is given in the earlier "Arranged biographies of Zhongni's [i.e. Confucius's] disciples" (*Zhongni dizi liezhuan* 仲尼弟子列傳) in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記). The *School Sayings of Confucius* came under intense scrutiny in the Qing and was dismissed by a number of scholars as an unreliable, late forgery, but the only cause for concern Lu Wenchao himself saw with this work

[82] The "five earls" refers to five rulers from the 7th to the 6th century BCE. Duke Huan of Qi, whom Guan Zhong served, was one of them. With this quote, Lu Wenchao makes clear that followers of Confucius look down upon matters relating to Duke Huan and, by extension, Guan Zhong. This would make it unlikely that Confucius himself had praised Guan Zhong.

[83] Lu Wenchao 盧文弨, "Lunyu Zilu Zigong yi Guan Zhong fei ren" 《論語》子路、子貢疑管仲非仁 (On Zilu and Zigong Doubting the Humaneness of Guan Zhong in the *Analects*), in idem, *Zhongshan zhaji* 鍾山札記 (Reading Notes from Zhongshan [Academy]) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 24. The preface to this collection is dated to 1790.

were the numerous scribal errors that had crept in during the long history of transmission.[84] With the help of this work, or at least some text that uses it as its source, Lu identifies Zigao and Jici as disciples from Qi, but dismisses them as possible culprits because they should have been above such trifling matters.

Since they are not to blame, Lu opts to combine the narrative of the gradual decline of Confucius's teachings with the insight that the *Analects* is the product of second-generation disciples. By their time, both "subtle words" and "great meaning" of Confucius's teachings had been lost, thus the editors cannot be measured with the same standards that would have applied to first-generation disciples of Confucius. As Lu puts it, the second-generation disciples incorporated what they had learned from their teachers, which could already be far removed from the original message of the sage. The positive influence of Confucius did not outlast him for long, a factor that also negatively influenced the composition of the *Analects*.

In the last part of this essay, Lu Wenchao adduces further pieces of evidence that speak against the authenticity of Confucius's praise for Guan Zhong. Lu maintains that the "manner of phrasing" (*ci qi* 辭氣) here is of a completely different kind when compared to the one Confucius normally uses. Furthermore, he quotes the *Mengzi* saying that "among the disciples of Confucius, there is no one who talks about the affairs of [the dukes] Huan and Wen." (仲尼之徒無道桓、文之事者) Duke Huan is the ruler in whose questionable rise to power Guan Zhong was implicated, which is alluded to in the *Analects*. If the *Mengzi* says that the disciples of Confucius do not discuss such things, then a passage containing such discussions has no place in the *Analects*. Lu Wenchao closes his argumentation with an exclamation that is meant to express his certainty in this case:

> Extreme indeed! This is how one knows that Confucius by no means could have said something like this.[85]
>
> 甚哉！有以知孔子之必無是謂矣。

As the argumentation of the first scholar to publicly refute this theory shows, Lu Wenchao made the right rhetorical move when he refused to believe that Confucius could have uttered this

[84] Lu Wenchao, "Chong ke He zhu Kongzi jiayu xu" 重刻何註孔子家語序 (Preface to the Reprint of the *School Sayings of Confucius* with the He-Commentary), in *Baojing tang wen ji* 抱經堂文集 (*Collection of Writings from the Hall of Embracing the Classics*), in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (First Compilation of the Complete Collection of Collectanea) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), vol. 147, 78.
[85] Ibid.

statement. This at least even Sun Zhizu, who argued against the solution proposed by Yuan Mei and Lu, would not question. Rather, Sun affirmed this principle, but found the argumentation that was supposed to back it up flawed. The discourse on Confucius in the late 18th century staunchly insisted on a pure and sanitized image of the master. In this case, it even developed into a competition to find the best explanation that would remove passages staining the image of Confucius.

Sun Zhizu's criticism of the debate

The title of Sun's text already gives the first clue as to where the argument is coming from. Where Lu had included the formulation "doubting the humaneness of Guan Zhong" (*yi Guan Zhong fei ren* 疑管仲非仁) in title of his essay, Sun simply called his "Guan Zhong is not Humane" (*Guan Zhong fei ren* 管仲非仁). There is no longer any doubt about Guan Zhong's moral qualities. If this is an allusion, it would imply that Sun was aware of Lu's research, but the formulation is generic enough to make a final decision impossible.

Sun Zhizu opens his essay by pointing out that Guan Zhong was "talented rather than virtuous" (*cai you yu de* 才優于德),[86] that he can take credit for a number of achievements and, most importantly, that Confucius did acknowledge these achievements. Even though Confucius had a favorable opinion of Guan's achievements, he did not praise Guan's moral standards, but had his doubts about them:

> The formulation "How was he humane?" [translated above as "How humane he was!"] probably expresses that [Confucius] remained unconvinced and did not grant it; it is not repeated to mean that he gladly granted it. How could the master lightly grant Guan Zhong the label of humaneness?[87]
>
> "如其仁？如其仁？"者，蓋疑而不許之詞，非重言以深許之也。豈有夫子而輕以仁許管仲乎？

Sun Zhizu shares the fundamental assumption with all the others who had worked on these passages: Confucius cannot have praised Guan Zhong for his morality. Instead of attacking this passage from the perspective of textual scholarship, Sun proposes a radically different reading

[86] Sun Zhizu 孫志祖, "Guan Zhong fei ren" 管仲非仁 (Guan Zhong is Not Humane), in *Du shu cuo lu* 讀書脞錄 (Minor Remarks on Books Read) (Taibei: Guangwen shuju, 1963), 2.17a.
[87] Ibid.

of its key formulation.[88] According to Sun, Confucius is asking a rhetorical question, expressing that Guan Zhong is not humane at all. Furthermore, Confucius is not repeating the phrase to stress his admiration, but to express exactly the opposite.

Sun Zhizu also displays an awareness of the textual scholarship meant to invalidate the passages about Guan Zhong as lore from Qi. While he never mentions Lu Wenchao or Yuan Mei, he argues against the exact position they had defended. Sun shows that he takes it serious as research by criticizing their handling of the sources:

> Scholars of later generations thereupon became suspicious that the pronouncements of the sage are one-sided and utterly at odds with the appraisal expressed in the passage on the "small capacity." They wanted to include these two passages in the Qi-recension of the *Analects* because they believed that all people from Qi know about is that there was a Guan Zhong. They did not know, however, that the Qi-recension is different because it contains the two additional chapters "Asking about the King" and "Knowing the Way." It is not that within the [shared] 20 chapters there is something the Lu-recension lacks that was added in the Qi-recension. Furthermore, the Qi-recension too is a true transmission from the school of Confucius, how could there have been deletions and insertions by people from Qi?[89]
>
> 後世學者遂疑聖人立論之偏與"器小"章抑揚懸絕，欲置此二章於《齊論》之內，以為齊人祇知有管仲云爾。不知《齊論》之所多者，《問王》、《知道》二篇，非此二十篇中亦有《魯論》所無，而為《齊論》所增者也。且《齊論》亦必是孔門之舊，豈容齊人刪潤點竄於其間乎。

If the title of Sun's essay alludes vaguely to Lu Wenchao, the fact that Sun mentions the trope of the limited horizon of the people from Qi may betray an awareness of the argument Yuan Mei had made. To be sure, this trope does go back to a dialog in the *Mengzi* and thus a basic text in late imperial higher education. Still, Yuan had used it to support his reasoning and was the first to do so in this scholarly exchange. Even though there is no clear evidence, it thus seems conceivable that Sun Zhizu had read the texts of both Lu and Yuan. Indeed, Lu's essay contains an explicit reference to Yuan, so that Sun was at least aware of Yuan's research is very likely, no matter where he read about this discussion.

[88] The solution that Sun Zhizu proposed is grammatically just as defendable as the standard reading.
[89] Ibid.

Whereas it is not entirely clear whom exactly Sun Zhizu was writing against, there can be no doubt that he thought little of the scholarly value of this debate. The bone of contention is the nature of the regional *Analects*-recensions. Yuan and Lu had invoked the one from Qi as a possible weak point in the transmission history, because words they considered subpar had been put into the mouth of Confucius through this recension. This implies that there had existed substantial differences in content between the recensions from Lu and from Qi. For Sun, such an image of the early *Analects* is unjustifiable and does not tally with what the sources have to say. He points out that the recensions only differ in terms of the presence (Qi-recension) or absence (Lu-recension) of two chapters towards the end of the text, and that the two recensions are otherwise identical. Finally, even though one of the recension has the label "Qi" attached to it, it is still subject to the same quality standards as everything else coming from the school of Confucius. Thus, there should not have been an opportunity for misguided followers to infuse their own ideas into the text.

The crux of the matter is that Sun criticizes the scholarship of the discussants while he himself makes an argument that rests solely on the *silence* of the sources. All the *Book of the [Former] Han* tells the reader about the 22 chapters of the Qi-recension of the *Analects* is a short comment saying: "Additionally 'Asking about the King' and 'Knowing the Way.'"[90] This is commonly understood to refer to two chapters that distinguish the Qi-recension from the one from Lu. Whether or not this means that both versions are the same in all other respects is an entirely different question. Yuan and Lu both argued based on the understanding that they are not identical, Sun explains that they are. This means that Sun has to give another explanation why the passages in which Confucius praises Guan Zhong should be invalidated, and he does so by offering a new interpretation. The fundamental question of whose reading of the source material is correct is not explicitly addressed. Both sides have settled on one possible understanding and build their argumentation on that basis. Both sides, in other words, fill the gap in the sources in a distinct way, and the further steps they take to make their points are determined by that choice.

A belated response by Shen Tao

In a belated response to this debate by Shen Tao, every aspect has become more complex, but the guiding assumptions remain firmly in place. The preface of the collection of notes in which Shen discusses this issue is dated to 1836, by which time all discussants analyzed so far had

[90] "多問王知道" *Hanshu*, 30.1716.

long passed away. The first of the two consecutive entries on the topic is similar to Sun Zhizu's argumentation in that it questions the understanding of the different recensions that the discussants have upheld. The second one produces evidence from the *Book of the Later Han* to show that the Confucians of the Han dynasty favored a different reading of one of the passages relating to Guan Zhong, which moderates the positive impression of Guan Zhong.

In a long citation, which I analyze in detail below, Shen Tao introduces the development of the debate from Gu Xiancheng to Lu Wenchao. The gist is that passages from the Qi-recension of the *Analects* have made their way into the Lu-recension. Like Lu Wenchao, Shen attaches his opinion on what he quotes in the form of a comment:

> Tao's [=My] comment: This theory is complete nonsense. The Qi- and Lu-*Analects* are like the Qi- and Lu-*Odes*. At that time, the teachers of the classics from Qi and Lu all held on to their school traditions, as there were differences between them when it came to the glosses and the [divisions of] verses and chapters. As a consequence, there was the differentiation between the schools of Qi and Lu. It is not as if there was one *Analects*-text from Qi and different *Analects*-text from Lu.[91]
>
> 濤案：此說謬甚。齊《論》、魯《論》猶齊《詩》、魯《詩》，當時齊、魯經生各守師說，訓詁章句間有不同，遂有齊、魯二家之別。非齊《論語》一書而魯《論語》又一書也。

The main thrust of Shen's argument is that the regional qualifier before the name of the work does not suggest different texts, but local schools of interpretation that have developed a distinct profile. In doing so, he connects the discussion on the *Analects* to the larger issue of early modes of textual transmission. His aim is to denigrate the theories put forward by the Gu brothers, Yuan Mei, and Lu Wenchao: They had identified certain passages in the received *Analects* as relics originating from assumed regional recensions. If there had never been regional recensions, their arguments collapse.

Operating with the same source base as Sun Zhizu, Shen Thao refers back to the *Book of the [Former] Han* and the two additional *Analects*-chapters in the Qi-recension it mentions. According to his reading of the passage, which is again reminiscent of Sun's argumentation,

[91] Shen Tao, *Jiaocui xuan biji* 交翠軒筆記 (Notebook from the Hut of Exchange of Green Jade), 3.4b, in *Qing ren kaoding biji* 清人考訂筆記 (Evidential Notebooks by Qing Scholars) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 460.

the fact that two additional chapters are recognized as the main difference "clearly" (*ming* 明)[92] means that the recensions are identical in all other respects. That is to say, in effect, that the passages everyone agrees are dubious cannot be invalidated on textual grounds as they are shared by all known early editions. Shen finds harsh words for those who attempt to do so:

> How does one not make a fool of oneself when, like these two gentlemen [Gu Xiancheng and Yuan Mei], one points out that this passage in the *Analects* is from the Qi-recension and that passage from the Lu-recension? Both Gu and Yuan are no men of learning, so it is not at all unusual that they propose unfounded theories. However, that scholars [or: Lu Wenchao, who was often addressed by his bureaucratic rank "Academician"] too adopt these farfetched theories with great fanfare when they explain the classics is something that deserves capital punishment that cannot be mitigated.[93]
>
> 若如二君所云是一《論語》中此章指為齊《論》，彼章指為魯《論》，豈不可笑？顧、袁均非學人，臆說固無足怪。學士說經鏗鏗乃亦取此謬悠之論，誅不可解。

In these closing sentences of his essay, Shen Tao denies some of the participants in this debate the status of a "man of learning"[94] and questions the judgment of those who build their arguments on theories proposed by non-scholars. Shen maintains that none of the explanations successfully invalidate those passages where Confucius speaks highly of Guan Zhong. According to Shen, the passages have to be accepted as they are found in the received text, and the idea that the different regional labels refer to distinct recensions is a product of unscholarly fancy.

To say that the passages have to be accepted does not mean that their interpretation is obvious. Like Sun Zhizu, Shen Tao questions whether Confucius's words indeed amount to praise for Guan Zhong. But unlike Sun, Shen is able to produce textual evidence for a different reading of one of the passages. He discusses it in the entry in his notes that comes right after the one just analyzed.

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid, 3.5a/461.
[94] One possible reason why Shen Tao does not call Gu Xiancheng and Yuan Mei „men of learning" is that Gu was most active in politics, and Yuan is best remembered as a poet. It is furthermore important to keep in mind that Shen lived much later than all the other scholars considered in this study; the scholars who were active in the 18th and early 19th century did not insist on such distinctions, as far as I am aware.

In chapter 14 of the *Analects*, Confucius discusses Guan Zhong in three passages. In the last one, Confucius justifies Guan Zhong's decision not to die with his lord,[95] as the code of conduct of the period would expect him to. At least this is the majority reading, to which Shen Tao objects. The last and crucial part of the passage goes as follows:

> Why should he behave like common men and common women, who, in their faithfulness, drown themselves in drains and ditches, without anyone knowing about them?[96]
>
> 豈若匹夫匹婦之為諒也，自經於溝瀆，而莫之知也。

According to the majority reading, Confucius does not expect Guan Zhong to die because the latter is no ordinary man, but rather one who still has a lot to give to the Chinese people. This reading has the benefit of being entirely intuitive as Confucius lays out Guan Zhong's contributions in detail right before that sentence, thus Guan is the assumed topic of this sentence, too.

In his note on this sentence, Shen Tao deviates from traditional readings in two ways. First, he claims that *gou du* 溝瀆 ("drains and ditches") is in fact the name of a place in Lu, namely the "hill of Judu" (*Judu zhi qiu* 句瀆之丘), which is also mentioned in the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳). Second, and more important, Shen produces evidence that in the Han dynasty, this passage was understood quite differently:

> In the "Biography of Ying Shao" in the *Book of the Later Han*, it says: "In the past, there was the trouble with Zhao Hu's relative Zijiu, and Confucius said: 'To drown himself in the hill of Judu [or: in drains and ditches], without anyone knowing about him.'" This shows that the Confucians of the Han thought that this expression refers to Zhao Hu.[97]
>
> 《後漢書・應劭傳》："昔召忽親子糾之難，而孔子曰：'自經於溝瀆，而莫之知。'"是漢儒以此語為指召忽而言。

The part Shen Tao quotes is an excerpt from a discussion by the official Ying Shao 應劭 (died ca. 204 CE), in which no mention is made of Guan Zhong. The most obvious option for the reader is to follow Shen's suggestion and accept that Ying Shao takes the statement in question

[95] Guan Zhong was the tutor of one of the princes of Qi. This prince contended for the throne with his brother, lost the power struggle and consequently his life.
[96] *Analects* 14.17.
[97] Shen Tao, *Jiaocui xuan biji*, 3.5a-5b/461.

to refer to Zhao Hu. It is not my concern here to judge the reading Shen Tao proposes, but it is nevertheless important to note the issues that arise when one follows his suggestion. As already mentioned, the understanding that the sentence in the *Analects* refers to Guan Zhong is intuitive because he is the topic throughout Confucius's utterance. While silent changes of the subject are not at all alien to Classical Chinese, this would be an extreme case. Furthermore, even if this last sentence of the passage does not talk about Guan Zhong in an apologetic manner, the rest unambiguously does. Even if one grants Shen Tao the partial invalidation of Confucius's praise, the bulk of his *laudatio* remains unchallenged.

Besides the argumentation, the format in which Shen Tao made his case illustrates how the scholarly discourse functioned in the Qing. In the first part of the first entry concerning the issue of Confucius's praise for Guan Zhong, Shen extensively quotes from Lu Wenchao's essay. Because Shen quotes the part where Lu himself quotes others, the result is a complex textual web with threads originating from different texts, in which quotations reach the fourth level. Figure 2 illustrates how the different sources are nested within each other as they convey the history of the discussion.

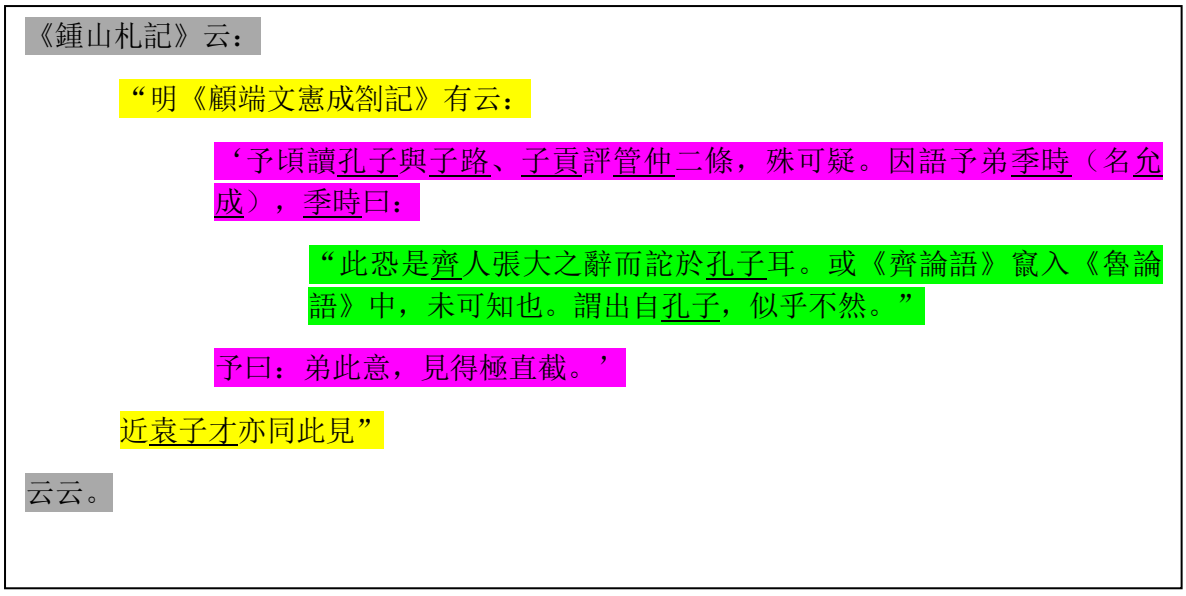

Figure 2: Quotations within quotations in Shen Tao's notebook entry

In principle, this is the standard format for many scholarly essays from that period, though most cases are less complex. The outermost frame refers to Lu Wenchao's text, which itself quotes from Gu Xiancheng's writings. Gu's text is the substantive center that contains more than just the formulaic "X says." However, instead of offering his own position, Gu quotes his brother, whose suggestion that a passage from the Qi-*Analects* made its way into the other recensions is

at the core of the whole exchange. In essence, the first three lines introduce a text or a speaker by name. The fourth line contains the theory, which I have translated above. The fifth and sixth line contain words of agreement, and the final line contains an "et cetera" that refers to the rest of Lu's essay. I have assigned a color to every speaker for enhanced clarity. Shen Tao is grey, Lu Wenchao is yellow, Gu Xiancheng is purple, and his brother Gu Yuncheng is green.

In an intricate yet economical manner, Shen Tao has introduced not only the proposition he is about to discuss in his essay, but also the names of the scholars involved and with that a sense of the history of the debate.

Regardless of the persuasiveness of his proposals, Shen Tao argues in a manner that is highly indicative how the discourse on the *Analects* functioned during the late 18th and the early 19th century. The assumption was that Confucius was a man of high ethical standards who never erred in his judgments. Since Guan Zhong did not live up to the standards that Qing scholars applied, they doubted whether Confucius would have praised him. This image of Confucius was the benchmark against which they measured everything, and the basis on which they dismissed passages as untrustworthy.

Due to an intellectual climate obsessed with textual evidence, this dismissal depended on proof from the sources. The line of reasoning which the Gu brothers, Yuan Mei and Lu Wenchao chose was that Guan Zhong was linked to the state of Qi, which was linked to a specific *Analects*-recension. In order to prove that Confucius had not said what the text claimed he did, they questioned the reliability of the Qi-recension and had the relevant quotes at hand. Sun Zhizu and Shen Tao vehemently disagreed, and offered proof that the recensions must have been in agreement about the content of this specific chapter. Tellingly, however, they too made an effort to show that Confucius had not praised Guan Zhong by offering a different interpretation of his words. The character of Confucius was at the heart of the discussion, not a textual question per se. Qing scholars relied on evidence, and (as figure 2 makes clear) were not afraid to make ample use of it. Yet, their primary concern was to negate anything that challenged their reading expectations, which were based on a highly selective image of antiquity.

Dissecting the *Analects*: Employing textual scholarship to whitewash the image of Confucius

In the eyes of Qing scholars, the fact that Confucius praised Guan Zhong as humane was only the tip of a large iceberg consisting of material collected in the *Analects* that made Confucius appear in a dubious light. In the previous section, I have focused on a set of passages linked to one specific issue in the transmission history of the *Analects* to highlight the stability of the basic assumption about the flawlessness of Confucius. This section analyzes different issues scholars had with the received texts and the various solutions they proposed. These solutions range from grand theories about the early transmission of the *Analects* to microscopic philological research on the punctuation of one sentence. Behind the widely diverging nature of the answers, the same assumption shows through. Those passages that challenged this image of Confucius attracted the bulk of textual criticism

As a counterpoint to what is to follow, it is helpful to keep in mind what Christoph Harbsmeier did a long time ago: to group an array of *Analects*-passages around themes of humor and jest. According to his interpretation, Confucius is "an impulsive, emotional, and informal man."[98] The *Analects* indeed offers ample material that lends itself to light-hearted interpretations of Confucius. No such lightheartedness shows through in the readings discussed in this section. Rather, Confucius appears as a serious man who is aware of his mission to stem the tide of the times, and who is out to better the world. This awareness did not lead to arrogance, however, as scholars read the *Analects* in a way that brought out the modesty of Confucius.

Sun Zhizu, who contributed to the debate analyzed in the previous section with a radically new reading of an *Analects*-passage on Guan Zhong, also had something to say about one passage in which Confucius immodestly puts his love of learning above that of everyone else:

> The master says: "In a hamlet of ten families, there certainly are those who are as loyal and trustworthy as I am, but they are not as fond of learning as I am."[99]
>
> 子曰："十室之邑，必有忠信如丘者焉，不如丘之好學也。"

According to the mainstream interpretation, Confucius says here that his outstanding quality is his love of learning. While others may be as loyal and trustworthy as Confucius, they cannot be

[98] Christoph Harbsmeier, "Confucius Ridens: Humor in the *Analects*," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, no. 50, vol.1, June 1990, 131.
[99] *Analects* 5.28.

considered his equal in this regard. Although this reading was not entirely stable throughout all times, it usually prevailed without much challenge. Sun Zhizu, however, assembled the most prominent of those who disagreed in the second and final part of a short essay titled "Punctuation of the *Analects*" (*Lunyu dianju* 論語點句). Each part consists of an extensive quotation from the *Collectanea of the Guest from the Wild* (*Yeke congshu* 野客叢書) by the Southern Song scholar Wang Mao 王楙 (1151-1213) concerning punctuation in the *Analects*, which is followed by Sun Zhizu's assessment. The second part records what Wang Mao had learned from his teacher about this *Analects*-passage and how he disagrees:

> [My (i.e., Wang Mao's) teacher] said: "Confucius was modest in all respects; he should not himself say that others were not as fond of learning as he was. If one only moves the full stop after the character *yan* to before that character and reads *yan* [焉] as *yan* [煙], the meaning of the text becomes completely different." [Wang Mao:] Yet if one looks at how the *History of the Northern Dynasties* quotes this sentence, then it breaks off after *yan*. Thus one can see that later scholars did not need to come up with unfounded theories in their agitation when explaining the sagely classics.
>
> Zhizu's [=my] comment: The *Explanation of Texts* by Lu Deming says: "*Yan*, standard reading of the character. Wei Guan says: 'Read as *y*[*u*]+[*qi*]*an*, acts as head of the lower sentence.'" Thus the reading of the teacher certainly has basis.[100]
>
> 謂"孔子每事謙遜，不應自謂人不如我好學。只移'焉'字下一點於'焉'字上，以'焉'字作'煙'字讀，文意夐別。"然觀《北史》引此語，則曰"如某者焉"，因知後學之解聖經不必用意過當為穿鑿之說。
>
> 志祖案：陸德明《釋文》云："焉，如字。衛瓘：'於虔反，為下句首。'"則老先生之讀解固有本矣。

There is a lot of going back and forth within these few lines. Wang Mao reports the reading of his teacher, only to contradict it. Sun Zhizu, who used the quote in his essay, finally supports Wang's teacher with yet another quote. Sun and the teacher of Wang Mao defend their preferred reading based on a change of punctuation. This is an option because texts in Classical Chinese

[100] Sun Zhizu, "*Lunyu dianju*" 論語點句 (Punctuation of the *Analects*), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 2.16a. Both functions of the character *yan* are now pronounced in an identical manner. According to the reconstruction of Baxter and Sagart, their initials still distinguished them in Middle Chinese. See William Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese. A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 370. The *fanqie* 反切 transcription offered by Lu Deming, in yet another quote, belongs to its use as "how?" in an initial position.

are normally not punctuated, and adding punctuation marks is thus inherently an act of interpretation.

The multiple meanings of the character *yan* 焉 are central for this operation. *Yan* can mean "therein/in relation to it" and is then mostly used at the end of a phrase. Another option for a final *yan* would be to see it as an emphatic particle. Both readings make sense in the *Analects*-passage in question, as understood by the majority of scholars. An initial *yan* in this passage, or more generally one before a verb, has an entirely different meaning. In such circumstances, *yan* acts as a question particle meaning "how?" Therefore, Confucius would say something along the following lines:

> The master says: "In a hamlet of ten families, there certainly are those who are as loyal and trustworthy as I am. How would there not be some as fond of learning as me?"
>
> 子曰："十室之邑，必有忠信如丘者，焉不如丘之好學也？"

In stark contrast to the reading translated above, Confucius affirms that the average person matches all of his positive qualities through a rhetorical question. A hamlet of ten families is not a particularly large settlement, but Confucius expresses certainty that he will find his equal within such a group. He may be the sage, but he considers himself no better than everyone else and exhibits modesty.

Going back to a comment by Wei Guan 衛瓘 (220-291) preserved in the Lu Deming's 陸德明 (556-627) *Explanation of the Texts of the Classics* (*Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文), Sun Zhizu reinforces what the teacher of Wang Mao had proposed, namely that Confucius "should not" talk about himself in such a laudatory manner. None of the discussants considers this an apocryphal statement erroneously attributed to Confucius. Rather, the weak point in the fabric of the *Analects* is the uncertainty about the role the character *yan* plays in this passage. Since both its initial and its final usage can make sense in this case and textual sources are available to support either understanding, the image one has of Confucius determines the reading: Either he is modest, or he stresses the importance of learning. Sun Zhizu chooses to stress his modesty.

Zhao Yi's doubts about the reliability of the Analects

Zhao Yi's 趙翼 (1729-1814) attempts to reconcile his faith in the sagely character of Confucius with the actual behavior of this figure recorded in the sources show far less respect for the integrity of the received texts. He considered them to be unreliable and thus stressed that one

had to exercise caution when reading them. Based on detailed historical analyses, Zhao argued that many stories about Confucius, even in authoritative sources, were spurious. All the while, however, it remained his goal to defend the image of Confucius against what he perceived to be defamation.

Zhao Yi's treatment of a story in the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) is instructive for how he approaches the lore about Confucius. The chapter "Tan Gong" 檀弓 records that Confucius lost his father while still young, but did not learn about the location of the grave until he had reached an age at which he already had disciples. This glaring lack of filial piety was inconceivable to Zhao Yi:

> Confucius was a numinous sage since birth, how did he not inquire about the grave of his father while his mother was still alive?[101]
>
> 孔子生而神聖，豈有母在時不問知父墓者？

According to Zhao, Confucius was not only a sage, but a numinous sage. Furthermore, this was no state he had reached at some point in his life, but an inborn quality. As such, Confucius surely would not have acted so contrary to the demands of filial piety as to not care about the location of his father's grave. Since his enlightened behavior was inborn, one cannot point to a long process of self-cultivation as an excuse for Confucius's delay in finding out about his ancestor.

After stating his assumptions, Zhao Yi's argumentation takes a philological turn. He takes issue with apologetic theories that try to save the face of Confucius by pointing out that the standard punctuation for one of the sentences is mistaken. One such theory posits that instead of not knowing where his father's grave was, Confucius simply did not know whether the coffin had been put in a shallow, temporary burial ground (*bin* 殯) or the funerary rites had been completed and the coffin was already buried deeply (*zang* 葬).[102] This would have made Confucius's oversight less severe. Instead of attempting a re-interpretation of the passage, however, Zhao Yi introduces his theory about the origins of the stories about Confucius in order to challenge their authority.

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[101] Zhao Yi 趙翼, „*Wufu qu*" 五父衢 (The Street of Wufu), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 (Various Studies Written While Caring for my Parents) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990), 45.
[102] Ibid.

> In general, those who recorded [things about] the rites got [these stories] from hearsay. They had no time to investigate them and wrote them down in books straight away, which is why there are such egregious mistakes. There are numerous anecdotes about Confucius in works like *Zhuangzi*, *Garden of Sayings*, *New Arrangement [of Anecdotes]*, *School Sayings of Confucius*, and *Kong Family Masters' Anthology*, and if one considers every single one of them true, then the sage becomes a shallow person.[103]
>
> 總由於記禮之家得諸傳聞，不暇審訂，輒筆之於書，故有此等謬誤。觀《莊子》及《說苑》、《新序》、《孔子家語》、《孔叢子》等書所傳孔子佚事甚多，若一一信以為真，則聖人反淺。

For Zhao Yi, the story in the *Record of Rites* is merely one instance of a much larger problem. Much like some of the scholars described in the previous section, such as Yuan Mei and Lu Wenchao, he has lost his faith in the editors of canonical works and no longer considers them reliable gatekeepers. Instead of taking a second look whether the stories they have gathered are true, these editors rushed to write them down and thereby granted them authority. The difference between them and the editors of works long held in much lower esteem is one of degree, and it is quite small. Thus, while works like the *Record of Rites* may for the most part be reliable, not everything they contain is authentic. Just as it would be absurd to take the *Zhuangzi* into account when constructing one's image of Confucius, Zhao implies, one cannot uncritically rely on the canon, but has to check even that material against what one knows about Confucius. For the *Analects*, Zhao Yi illustrates the matter in some detail:

> The books of people from the Warring States and early Han periods contain a great many bequeathed words of Confucius. Basically, what the *Analects* records is of the same kind as these records. It was only given the title *Analects* after the Confucians of Qi and Lu had discussed and ascertained [its content]. The character *yu* [speech; of the title *Lunyu*] refers to the words of the sage; the character *lun* [discussion] refers to the discussions of the Confucians. In picking out the purest parts from among the variegated and muddled records about the sage that do not differentiate between authentic and inauthentic when compiling this work, they certainly showed their insight, but how could it have been the case that they did not once or twice accept something superfluous?

[103] Ibid.

> Certainly one cannot consider every single story factual even when it is recorded in the *Analects*.[104]
>
> 戰國及漢初人書所載孔子遺言甚多，《論語》所記本亦同此記載之類，齊、魯諸儒討論而定，始謂之《論語》。語者，聖人之遺語；論者，諸儒之討論也。於雜記聖人言行真偽錯雜中取其純粹，以成此書，固見其有識，然安必無一二濫收者？固未可以其載在《論語》而遂一一信以為實事也。

This assessment connects two aspects of the genesis of the *Analects*: that it is the product not of Confucius himself, but of disciples, and that there existed many stories, often contradicting, about the master from which these disciples-turned-editors had to select. The historical trajectory that Zhao Yi envisions is that after the death of Confucius, the number of stories about him multiplied. The editors of the *Analects*, the identity of which Zhao Yi never specifies beyond the very generic "Confucians of Qi and Lu" in this essay, were faced with the sorry task of sifting through the material in order to collect the stories that best represent Confucius. They generally did a good job, but in the long run the *Analects* cannot deny its genealogy: It may consist of the words of Confucius selected by insightful disciples, but they have been chosen from a pool of stories of widely varying quality all the same, and this still shows through in some of them. In other words, for Zhao Yi Confucius may have been flawless, but the editors of the *Analects* were not. Therefore, one has to judge their product against one's own standards.

Based on this reasoning, Zhao Yi harnesses the superior historical knowledge provided by hindsight in order to evaluate the criteria the editors had applied to the lore about Confucius. In *Analects* 17.5, for example, Confucius entertains the possibility of following an invitation by a rebellious minister named Gongshan Furao 公山弗擾, the objection of his disciple Zilu notwithstanding. Zhao goes to great lengths to determine the historical background of this episode with the help of the *Zuo Tradition*, especially in order to find out when this is supposed to have happened. Based on his calculations, Zhao first faults the *Records of the Historian* for placing this story *after* the insurrection in its chronology, while granting the possibility that it would be conceivable that Gongshan could have issued the invitation *before* it. Armed with his detailed knowledge of historical and biographical background, however, Zhao denies the story in its current form any credibility:

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[104] Zhao Yi, "Gongshan Furao zhao Kongzi zhi bu ke xin" 公山弗擾召孔子之不可信 ([The Story of] Gongshan Furao Inviting Confucius is Not Trustworthy), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao*, 61.

> Since it was after the rebellion, when Confucius had just become minister of justice, there decidedly never occurred such a thing as him being invited and wanting to go. Our generation reads and learns the *Analects* as children, upon which one believes in it without the slightest doubt. No one ever goes back to the *Zuo Tradition* to check, [and failing to do so is] base indeed.[105]
>
> 既叛以後則孔子方為司寇，斷無召而欲往之事也。世人讀《論語》，童而習之，遂深信不疑，而不復參考《左傳》，其亦陋矣。

Being the numinous sage, Confucius would have never associated with someone like Gongshan Furao, whose rebellion Zhao Yi apparently considered at odds with Confucius's insistence on loyalty. This is especially obvious to Zhao given that, by his calculations, Confucius had just secured a high position in his home state of Lu as minister of justice when the rebellion broke out. All one needs to know to figure this out is available in the *Zuo Tradition*, the seminal commentary to the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), so why did no one look into the matter? The answer lies in the way in which everyone learns about the *Analects*: Reading it at a young age, everyone develops a faith in it that could aptly be termed "child-like," and thus never engages with it critically.[106]

Cui Shu's critical biography of Confucius

Taking Zhao Yi's theories about the formation of the *Analects* to their logical conclusion, readers themselves have to decide what to believe about Confucius. The text has lost its final authority over the image of Confucius and has to be completely scrutinized for erroneous inclusions of unfitting material. It was Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1816) who took this rather extreme step.

Zhao and Cui employ very compatible approaches. No issue is too minute too escape their attention, like Zhao Yi considering whether Confucius would bathe nude in public or whether hot springs were secluded areas.[107] Both rely heavily on the *Mengzi* for their sanitized image of

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[105] Ibid.

[106] The fact that it is the institutional setting that determines the reading of the *Analects* links well to Virginia Mayer Chan's assessment that Zhao Yi is deeply interested in institutional and social topics in his research. See Virgina Mayer Chan, "Historical Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China. A Case Study of Zhao Yi and the 'Zhexi' Historians" (Ann Arbor: UMI dissertation publishing, 1982), 74.

[107] This becomes an issue in the discussion of *Analects* 11.26, where Confucius asks some disciples about their dreams and expresses his admiration for the one who talks about taking a bath in spring. See Zhao Yi, "Yu hu Yi

Confucius. Yet while they have a lot in common, Cui Shu takes everything several steps further. This starts with the scale of the enterprise. Whereas Zhao has a small number of essays on this topic, Cui constructs a complete biography of Confucius. Zhao discusses the reliability of a few stories about Confucius in the *Analects* and the *Record of Rites*, Cui considers all of the lore about the master in all sources. Finally, whereas Zhao Yi at times contents himself with offering a new interpretation of a passage he considers dubious, Cui Shu is less reluctant to employ textual criticism and deny it any value.[108]

Unlike most of the other figures discussed in this chapter, Cui Shu has been of great interest to modern scholars since his endorsement by leading intellectuals of the republican period (1912-1949) like Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893-1980) and Hu Shi 胡適 (1892-1961). In Cui Shu, they found a native forerunner to the scientific methods in historical research that were *en vogue* then but mostly seen as something foreign from the West.[109] Kai-Wing Chow wrote his insightful article on Cui's "system of intelligibility" in response to the image of Cui Shu that grew out of his rediscovery in the early 20th century. Chow argues that construing Cui's research as objective was inaccurate and makes a number of important points that tally well with my own analysis in this chapter .[110] He states that "Cui's images of Confucius were preconceived and ideologically and methodologically driven by a powerful Confucian purism."[111] As Chow describes it, however, it appears as if Cui was going against the grain by doing so when in fact he was just the most extreme of a considerable group of scholars whose work on Confucius was guided by similar assumptions. Furthermore, Chow pays no attention to the philological theories that Cui evoked at every turn to substantiate his assumptions, and the neglect of this aspect obscures to what extent they were intertwined. Thus, I will argue here that the textual research of Cui Shu is one of the clearest expressions of Qing scholarship because Cui applied the narrow concept of authorship with utmost consistency, expressed much more detailed insights into matters of textual history, and was very vocal about how he expected Confucius to behave.

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feng hu Wuyu" 浴乎沂風乎舞雩 (Bathing in the Yi, Enjoying the Breeze at the Rain Altar), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao*, 64.

[108] For example, both take issue with the story of Confucius's visit to Nanzi in *Analects* 6.28, but Zhao proposes a new interpretation while Cui forcefully relegates it to the trash bin of apocrypha. I will discuss this below.

[109] Cf. Joshua Fogel, "On the 'Rediscovery' of the Chinese Past: Cui Shu and Related Cases," in idem, *The Cultural Dimension of Sino-Japanese Relations. Essays on the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Sharpe, 1995), 3-22.

[110] Kai-Wing Chow, "An Alternative Hermeneutics of Truth: Cui Shu's Evidential Scholarship on Confucius," in Ching-I Tu (ed.), *Interpretation and Intellectual Change. Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (New Brunswick: Transaction publishers, 2005), 19-32.

[111] Ibid, 21.

Zhao Yi had formulated why the received texts were not fully reliable and expressed his esteem for the character of Confucius. As we have seen, this turned out to be a decisive yet unacknowledged criterion in his evaluations of the stories he read. Cui Shu, by contrast, explicitly stated what ranked higher than the text itself in determining credibility. The guideline for reading the classics he proposed is as follows:

> Therefore I say that in reading the classics, one does not need to superficially respect them because they are the classics, but should only look for the intention of the sage, because if one knows that the cultivation of the sage is both profound and excellent, then what is forged will naturally be unable to throw the truth into disorder.[112]
>
> 故余謂讀經不必以經之故浮尊之，而但當求聖人之意；果知聖人之文之高且美，則偽者自不能亂真。

For Cui, the classics are the only gateway to the truth, but that does not mean that they are completely reliable. Rather, readers have to measure them against the "intention of the sage," and then they will easily identify the inauthentic parts. This statement makes clear that it is the sage that is authoritative, not the text of the classics. The classics are useful only insofar as they are conducive to finding the "intention of the sage." Due to their tenuous authority in such matters, doubts about the text of the classics are not harmful per se. In the case of the *Analects*, Cui identifies a number of obvious challenges to an early date of completion. These include some of the rulers of Lu during the time of Confucius being addressed with posthumous names, and disciples like Zengzi 曾子 and Youzi 有子 being "masters." However, his tone is not as pessimistic as that of the scholars discussed in the previous section, who had imagined many interested parties, some with intentions quite different from Confucius, taking part in compiling the *Analects*. While Cui does take issue with the way in which the "Treatise on Literature" portrays the textual history of the *Analects*, he describes the production circumstances of the work in favorable terms:

> Thus it was several decades after the demise of Confucius that disciples of [Confucius's] seventy disciples recorded what their teachers had relayed to them and turned it into chapters, and later Confucians collected it into a book. It was not the [first-generation] disciples of Confucius that recorded and collected it. And yet the meaning and principles

[112] Cui Shu 崔述, "Kaoxin lu tiyao juan shang" 考信錄提要卷上 (Higher Scroll of the Essentials of the *Record of Seeking What Is Trustworthy*), in Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (ed.), *Cui Dongbi yishu* 崔東壁遺書 (Works Bequeathed by Cui Shu) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1983), 11a.

> [of the *Analects*] are profound and pure, its style is clear and simple; compared to the *Record* [*of Rites*] by Dai, it alone has gotten hold of the truth. This is probably because they were sincere Confucians who cautiously corroborated the words of their teachers and did not dare to make great additions.[113]
>
> 則是孔子既没數十年後，七十子之門人追記其師所述以成篇，而後儒輯之以成書者，非孔子之門人弟子之所記而輯焉者也。然其義理精純，文體簡質，較之戴《記》，獨為得真。蓋皆篤實之儒，謹識師言，而不敢大有所增益於其間也。

As a rule of thumb, the *Analects* ranks high in Cui Shu's hierarchy of credibility. It was compiled by conscientious Confucians. At the same time, and comparable to what Zhao Yi had said, one still cannot believe everything only because these gatekeepers had allowed it in. In this passage, Cui also describes two important criteria with which he measured stories about Confucius: "meaning and principle" (*yili* 義理) and "style of writing" (*wenti* 文體). Cui accepts only those stories that are in accordance with Confucius's high ethical standards and written in the terse and plain style of the Spring and Autumn-period (8th to 5th century BCE).

The first important exception to the rule that the *Analects* is mostly reliable is that Cui Shu considers the last five chapters to be spurious collections that were appended very late.[114] Once Cui actually works on the text, this nice and clean-cut distinction necessarily fails, however, because it clashes with his two other criteria, namely principle and style. The existence of passages that seem questionable based on these criteria in other parts of the work forces him to adapt and fine-tune his theory in order to still harness its explanatory value. In the end, it is always about the credibility of the behavior ascribed to Confucius. Any other consideration, the theory about textual layers included, is secondary to that.[115]

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[113] Cui Shu, "Zhu-Si kaoxin lu" 洙泗考信錄 (Record of Seeking What Is Trustworthy in the [History of] Confucius) in Gu Jiegang (ed.), *Cui Dongbi yishu*, 321b.

[114] Ibid. Cui does not specify when the last five chapters were added; he only mentions the Warring States period (ca. 5th to 3rd century BCE) in this context, which makes it likely that he dated them to this time. For observations such as this one, Cui Shu is credited as the inventor of "layer theory" about the *Analects*, according to which the text consists of disparate, identifiable layers. As a result, modern works of textual scholarship proudly sport his name in their dedication. Cf. the dedication in Bruce and Taeko Brooks, *The Original Analects. Sayings of Confucius and his Successors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[115] Cui Shu dedicates long stretches of text to questions that pertain only to the textual history of the *Analects*, and his description of the various early recensions and how they were subsumed in the now-current hybrid version is miles ahead of what others like Lu Wenchao and Sun Zhizu had laid out. I did not analyze his theories in the second section because he has little to say about the Qi- and Lu-recensions and is not engaged in the same discussion. See Cui Shu, "Zhu-Si kaoxin lu," 284b-286a. It is this aspect that so endears Cui Shu to modern textual critics, but it remains an aspect.

On what grounds does Cui Shu define Confucius's ethical standards, and how does he support his reasoning? To answer these questions, it is instructive to go back to the story about Confucius considering to accept the invitation by the rebelling minister named Gongshan Furao, which, as explained above, was a thorn in the side of Zhao Yi, too. It should be noted that this story is to be found in chapter 17 of the *Analects*, i.e. in one of the "corrupt" ones as identified by Cui Shu, but that fact alone is not enough to discredit it.

First of all, Cui invokes the authority of the *Zuo Tradition*, where a passage states that Confucius in fact led the attack against the insubordinate subject in question. He continues by citing the passage from the *Mengzi* that Confucius produced the *Annals* precisely to inspire fear in the hearts of rebellious ministers, and would thus never come to their aid. Cui then quotes the *Annals* itself to showcase how Confucius criticized unruly underlings. Stories about Confucius's dismissive attitude towards persons of low ethical standards that Cui deems credible round off the picture. Cui finally points out, as did Zhao Yi, that by the time of the rebellion, Confucius had just become minister of justice. [116] This extensive display of sources is meant to rule out any possibility that the story told in the *Analects* ever took place. It consists of a mix of historical background information and what is known about Confucius's attitude towards political mutiny.

To Cui, the origins of stories such as this one are obvious, as is the identity of those who are to blame for their inclusion in the canon:

> This probably originates from strategists from the Warring States period who wanted to damage the reputation of the sage to serve their own selfish needs. Because they had only heard that Buniu [usually identified as a variation of Gongshan Furao's name] had rebelled against Lu, they expanded on that, claiming that Confucius had wanted to go [in response to the invitation], without knowing that the years do not match. (…) These strategists are not to blame, only the Confucians of later ages are, who, one after another, did nothing but high-mindedly discuss nature and fate (…).[117]
>
> 此蓋戰國橫議之士欲誣聖人以便其私，但聞不狃嘗畔魯，則附會之以為孔子欲往，而不知其年之不符也。(…) 彼橫議者固不足怪，獨怪後世之儒肩相望，踵相接，而但高談性命 (…)。

[116] Ibid, 283b-284b.
[117] Ibid, 292b.

In the world of the Warring States as envisioned by Cui Shu, traveling political and military consultants had an incentive to legitimize their own behavior of taking any employment offered, regardless of the ethical implications, by ascribing the same behavior to Confucius. This is simply part of the natural development of the culture of argumentation in early China, Cui asserts. What he cannot accept, however, is that none of the followers of Confucius looked into the matter, because anyone who did so would invariably have recognized the gross errors, such as mistaken dates. Instead, throughout history Confucians engaged in idle metaphysical speculation about "human nature and fate" (*xing ming* 性命), when the true way of Confucius was to be found in the traces of his actions all along.[118] One of the few who understood this principle was the Han dynasty scholar Zhao Qi 趙岐 (108-201), author of the earliest extant commentary on the *Mengzi*. Cui Shu repeatedly expresses his regret that no one did for the *Analects* what Zhao had done for the *Mengzi*, namely to carefully weed out everything that does not belong in the work.[119]

Special cases, like the one above, require a special and extensive treatment, even if they are recorded in the most unreliable parts of the *Analects*. Conversely, even the largely dependable chapters of that work sometimes contain dubious material. For such cases, Cui Shu sharpens his analytical instruments by refining what is to be considered core and what fringe *within* the chapters. The 23 characters in chapter 6 of the *Analects* that recount the aftermath of Confucius's visit to Nanzi 南子, the wife of Duke Ling of Wei 衛靈公, have given rise to wide range of interpretations in the long history of *Analects*-commentary.[120] The complete passage is as follows:

> The master visited Nanzi. Zilu was displeased. The master swore to him, saying: "Wherein I have acted improperly, may heaven strike me down! May heaven strike me down!"[121]
>
> 子見南子。子路不說。夫子矢之曰："予所否者，天厭之！天厭之！"

It consists of two sections of roughly equal length: First comes the narrative, stripped to its bare bones, that introduces the context, upon which follows the utterance of Confucius. Save for the reaction of the disciple Zilu, Cui Shu finds fault with every aspect of this passage. Following

[118] Ibid, 326a.
[119] For example ibid, 285b.
[120] See Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators*, esp. 57-59 and 139-141.
[121] *Analects* 6.28.

the lead of the commentary ascribed to Kong Anguo 孔安國 (2nd to 1st century BCE), which expressed doubts about the veracity of this story, Cui explains why it is highly dubious:

> Due to the separation of men and women, they should not have seen each other in the first place. Add to this [her] licentiousness and unruliness, and it becomes all the more inappropriate. Pointing to heaven and swearing is also at odds with the way the sage normally expresses himself as recorded in the *Analects*. Mister Kong is correct in doubting this.[122]
>
> 蓋男女之別，本不應見。加以淫亂，益非所宜，而指天為誓，亦與《論語》所記聖人平日之言不倫。孔氏疑之是也。

Meeting with a woman that acts in opposition to his standards (by taking part in her husband's governing activities) *and* despite the separation of sexes, only to swear in front of a disciple who expresses dissatisfaction with his behavior afterwards is not something the Confucius Cui Shu knows would have done. To be sure, all major *Analects*-commentators had attempted to smooth out the rough edges of Confucius in this story, but they did so by pointing to the desperate situation of Confucius at the time, or alternatively that he had to accept an invitation to see her to avoid greater harm. Cui Shu displays an awareness of this part of the commentarial tradition, but dismisses it in a roundabout manner as unfounded and forced apologetics. His theory about the textual history of the *Analects*, however, is the key to the riddle:

> Note: This passage is located at the end of chapter 6, only 2 passages come after it. What is recorded within a chapter may mostly be pure, but at the end of a chapter there are often a couple of passages that are not of a kind with the rest. (…) [Their] meaning and style is at odds with the rest of the chapter, and some of the sayings are fragmentary. All of this looks like broken slips of bamboo as well as insertions and additions to the text by later generations. It was probably that, in the beginning, the chapters were all transmitted separately, and those who transmitted them pasted their continuations to the end of the chapters.[123]

[122] Cui Shu, "Zhu-Si kaoxin lu," 290b.
[123] Ibid, 290b-291a.

按：此章在《雍也篇》末，其後僅兩章。篇中所記雖多醇粹，然諸篇之末往往有一二章不相類者。(…) 意旨文體皆與篇中不倫，而語亦或殘缺。皆似斷簡，後人之所續入。蓋當其初，篇皆別行，傳之者各附其所續得於篇末。

As Cui Shu has already explained, chapters 1 to 15 make up to the core of the *Analects*. Yet within these chapters, a further differentiation is necessary, due to the circumstances in which the early versions of this work were transmitted. Every chapter formed a stand-alone unit, and people added to the end of a chapter passages they deemed worthy of inclusion. This explains why the story about Confucius and Nanzi as well as three other dubious passages Cui lists are all to be found near or at the end of their respective chapter. This difference manifests itself in stylistic variations as well:

> Furthermore, when the *Analects* records something about Confucius, it invariably refers to him as "master" (*zi*). Only this passage and the three passages on "[the disciples] sitting in attendance," "Yi and Ao" and "city of Wu" use "honorable master" (*fuzi*), which is questionable, too. Thus these three passages below have probably been taken from other books by later generations and added to the chapter ends, without anyone finding the time to check their quality. What they describe did not necessarily take place; there is no need to come up with contorted explanations for them.[124]

且《論語》記孔子事，皆稱"子"，惟此章及"侍坐"、"羿羿"、"武城"三章稱"夫子"，亦其可疑者。然則此下三章，蓋後人采他書之文，附之篇末，而未暇別其醇疵者。其事固未必有，不必曲為之解也。

What sets the episode about Nanzi apart from the rest of the *Analects* is the use of the appellation for Confucius. While the appellation "master" (*zi*) is ubiquitous in the text, the appellation "honorable master" (*fuzi*) is relatively rare, and, what matters here, mostly appears in direct speech when others address Confucius or speak about him. In the narrative parts, it is only used five times.[125] Since this long list of factors speaks against the credibility of the story of Confucius's visit to Nanzi, Cui Shu sees no reason to come up with farfetched explanations to justify Confucius's behavior. The story is simply apocryphal.

[124] Ibid, 291a.
[125] Besides the four instances mentioned by Cui Shu, there is *Analects* 18.6. Maybe this does not count for him because it is from one of the last chapters.

Cui Shu has a lot more to say about the lore about Confucius, but the pattern outlined above remains fairly stable. Indignation about the content of a passage invariably leads to an argumentation that denies it any credibility. For this, Cui often harnesses the power of arguments informed by his knowledge about the textual history of the *Analects* and stylistic criteria. All in all, however, Cui's contributions are a mixed blessing for Chinese textual criticism. While his keen eye for slight differences in style is undeniable, Cui is first and foremost out to defend his idealized image of Confucius. Scholars have long recognized this,[126] but if Cui's approach is juxtaposed with that of others who were active during the late 18th century, it becomes possible to see how intertwined textual criticism and doctrinal assumptions were. One can credit these scholars with many discoveries about the nature of early texts like the *Analects*. But because they were concerned with interpretative issues, they never crossed the threshold and abstracted from their images of what Confucius would have said and done.

Conclusion

Like any other formative text, the *Analects* presents a perennial problem to its readers. Though a product of a certain time, it is supposed to have timeless value, but some parts resist easy transposition to the age of the reader because they record behavior that has become indefensible. Sometimes, this discrepancy is resolved through interpretative devices such as allegorical readings.

In 18th-century China, where knowledge about and interest in the textual histories of early works was common among the scholarly elite, discussion followed a different trajectory. The deeds and sayings of Confucius were no longer Confucian enough for some scholars, and the nature of the discourse on early texts gave them the power to challenge not only earlier readings, but also the sources. In a discourse in which the authority of agents involved in the production of early texts other than the author was in need of defense, the fact that the *Analects* was compiled by disciples became a liability. In other words, because the concept of authorship was narrowing down to only include one person, the cracks in the texture of early works came under intense scrutiny.

This is the point at which explicit discussions in the Qing set in. That Qian Daxin denied the disciples of Confucius any agency becomes fully understandable against the potential loss of

[126] Kai-Wing Chow quotes something similar from Gu Jiegang's preface to Cui Shu's collected works, which is dated to 1980. See Kai-Wing Chow, "An Alternative Hermeneutics of Truth," 21.

authority that threatened the *Analects* because of its textual history. His reasoning is simple: Because the disciples were mere mouthpieces, faithful but uncreative, the fact that they were the ones who transmitted the words of Confucius has no influence on the status of these words. They are translucent to the point of virtual non-existence. Without actually widening the concept of authorship, Qian finds room for more people in the confined space of the single author.

While Qian's theory was picked up by some contemporary and later scholars, it remained a marginal voice in intense debates over the exact nature of the influence that the disciples of Confucius had wielded over the formation of the *Analects*. The distinction between the recensions of the states of Qi and Lu was crucial for this undertaking, since it allowed scholars to classify dubious material that related to all things Qi as remnants of the long-lost Qi-recension. The exact nature of this recension remained unclear, but some of the scholars involved argued that it allowed for the influx of stories with a certain local color. Others denied that the nature of the Qi-recension was like this, but even the detractors agreed that the passages in question were not in accordance with the expected behavior of Confucius. They defended their image of Confucius not through textual operations, but by challenging the established interpretation. Even more fundamental, thus, than the textual history of the *Analects* was the idealized image of the sage that informed interpretation and textual scholarship alike. To speak in terms understandable to Herr K., cited at the beginning of the chapter, the students had long forgotten the mistakes of the master.

As the research of the most comprehensive critics of the lore about Confucius indicates, it must have been a very thorough forgetting. Cui Shu's attempt to overhaul the biography of Confucius from scratch turned it into nothing less than a hagiography. Not the slightest stain was allowed on the record of the sage. Along the way, Cui Shu developed an advanced and complex theory about the formation and early transmission of the *Analects*. Even though he took everything that informed the research of other scholars like Zhao Yi, Yuan Mei and Lu Wenchao one step further, Cui was by no means unique in his approach. For all their use of textual evidence and detailed analyses, the scholarship of these men remained bound by their assumptions about the ethical standards of Confucius. Research on the *Analects* never broke free from these confines in the 18th century.[127]

[127] It is not unconceivable that it was exactly this over-idealized image, nourished throughout the heyday of the Qing dynasty, that played in the role in the outburst of anti-Confucian sentiments of the early 20th century.

As far as textual scholarship motivated by preconceived ideas goes, there is an intriguing parallel in European humanism. Isaac Causabon (1559-1614) was propelled to prove the inauthenticity of a text because he was unable to accept "a pagan revelation clearer than the Jewish."[128] At issue was that the text in question was supposed to be a translation of ancient Egyptian wisdom. As such, it would have predated Moses, which in turn would mean that God had revealed himself to the pagans first, and only then to his so-called chosen people. It is not hard to see why this conclusion would have been too much for steadfast Christians. Despite the advanced *instrumentarium* that Causabon employed in his reasoning, such as linguistic analysis, modern scholars evaluate him critically. According to Anthony Grafton, the "defects in Causabon's historical insight, moreover, stemmed from the convictions that impelled him to attack Hermes in the first place."[129]

Regardless of all their differences, the philologists of early modern Europe and the Qing dynasty shared the tendency to grant their reading expectations a decisive role in their textual scholarship. They were certain that they already possessed a correct understanding of ancient history, and used this understanding as the benchmark against which to measure the texts they studied. For the present-day researcher, this means that awareness of their motives is an important precondition for the analysis of the writings of these philologists, since these motives shaped their results.

That scholars had certain assumptions about the texts they read, however, is not enough to explain the reorganizations of the received text that scholars proposed. The aura of uncertainty that surrounded the texts made it possible for scholars to imprint their own readings back into the texts, and this uncertainty was a result of the stringent application of the narrow concept of authorship. In the terms introduced in the introduction, Confucius was the originator of the content, and as such remained unassailable. His disciples, however, no matter of which generation, were the creators of the *Analects* and could thus be blamed for everything that was wrong with the text. The identification of specific errors remained bound by the assumptions of Confucius's infallibility that characterized the scholarship of the period, but how scholars dealt with these errors is equally symptomatic. They exploited the loss of authority the text suffered once distance between the creator of the content and the creator of the text had become an issue.

[128] Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text. The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450-1800* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991), 169.
[129] Ibid, 161.

2. Dissolving the author: Texts as historical artefacts with many creators

The first chapter has documented the consequences of the narrow concept of authorship that many Qing scholars employed in their textual research. Simply put, they expected a text to have one author. Any exception to this rule constituted a problem they had to solve, as the diverse attempts to come to terms with the input of the disciples in the creation of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) show. These attempts ranged from playing down this input to scrutinizing it for errors. In the case of the *Analects*, possible original contributions by disciples were a pressing issue of a highly concrete nature. If they introduced something new into the text, scholars had to identify it. Given the stature of Confucius, the figure described in the *Analects*, such an effort becomes understandable.

By contrast, scholars who pondered the history of texts associated with lesser figures had much more space to acknowledge later contributions. Freed from the need to defend the character of the supposed author, they sometimes formulated abstract concepts that explained why later contributions did not threaten the integrity of a work. So-called "master texts" (*zi shu* 子書) constituted the main source material for this undertaking, since they had a far lower standing in the intellectual hierarchy and a number of them bear obvious marks of having passed through many hands. Other texts, while more authoritative than the "master texts," fit into the same line of inquiry because of their tenuous author-ascriptions. For those who reflected on prolonged processes of textual creation in the late 18th century, the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳) and the preface to the *Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) offered valuable insights into the matter. The common thread that unites these deliberations is that the transmission of a text is an active process in which transmitters adapt knowledge and teachings to their historical circumstances, which invariably leaves its mark on the written record. In its most developed form, such an *expanded concept of authorship* recognized the value of the cumulative writing process as a reflection of the way in which texts were used in earlier times.

Doubts concerning the applicability of the narrow concept of authorship to pre-imperial texts constituted a challenge to evidential studies. This type of scholarship, which dominated the discourse in the 18th century, rested on the dualism of authentic versus forged and needed the single author to make this distinction. Based on a comparison between what the supposed author could have known, which includes both historical facts and intellectual insights, and what the

text contained, evidential scholars decided whether author and text matched. Both author and text were seen as closed, individual entities that did not develop over time. By contrast, the expanded, inclusive concept of authorship posited that no such borders existed, as many people worked together in producing a text that, once put into writing, remained open for revision. From such a point of view, the terms "authentic" and "forged," at least as conventionally understood by Qing dynasty scholars, were meaningless.[130]

A small number of scholars writing in the late 18th century, who generally did not fully identify with the intellectual mainstream of the time, visibly struggled to align what they knew about the earliest stages of transmission of a text with established author-ascriptions. The first section of this chapter analyzes attempts by Qing scholars to resolve the tension between the narrow concept of authorship and the peculiarities of many transmitted texts. It focuses on Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738-1801), who went furthest among his contemporaries by formulating an elaborate historical theory of an inclusive concept of authorship. According to Zhang, that a text was named after a certain person does not mean that he was the author, or even the creator of the content. Rather, authors named texts after the founders of intellectual lineages when they wrote down their teachings, which could happen centuries after these founders had passed away. In the world of oral transmission that was early China, the written word was secondary to the living spirit of teachings.

While its level of detail stands out, Zhang Xuecheng's proposition must be understood as part of a more widespread tendency to shift attention away from the author and towards textual history. Abstract deliberations about concepts of authorship led to concrete changes in how scholars evaluated works whose authorship was in doubt. Qing scholars realized that when they worked with an inclusive concept of authorship, they were able to weaken claims of inauthenticity. The appeal of allowing multiple authors lay in the fact that by doing so, they could make a stronger case for the value of works that contained obvious later insertions. In effect, defending the integrity of the transmitted text with the inclusive concept of authorship shows its potential to overcome (or undo, depending on the perspective) what textual scholarship had arduously worked to prove in the preceding century or so.

[130] The conviction that the narrow concept of authorship is not conducive to the study of early Chinese texts has now become consensus among Sinologists. Cf. Paul Fischer, "Authentication Studies (辨偽學) Methodology and the Polymorphous Text Paradigm," in *Early China* 32, 2008-2009, 1f. Martin Kern, "The 'Masters' in the *Shiji*," in *T'oung Pao* 101, 4-5, 2015, 335-362. Tao Jiang, "The Problem of Authorship and the Project of Chinese Philosophy: Zhuang Zhou and the *Zhuangzi* between Sinology and Philosophy in the Western Academy," in *Dao*, 15, 2016, 35-55.

The second section analyzes what may be one of the bigger ironies in Qing intellectual history. In the late 18th century, the very findings Yan Ruoqu's 閻若璩 (1636-1704) had amassed to prove the inauthenticity of the so-called "Old Text chapters" of the canonical *Venerated Documents* (*Guwen Shangshu* 古文尚書) gave rise to a wave of apologetic writings, defending what he had vehemently attacked. One of the central pillars of Yan's textual criticism was the claim that the Old Text chapters recycle a substantial number of phrases from other works. For Yan, the mistakes the forger made when incorporating these phrases into his text gave him away. Yan concluded that the Old Text chapters of the *Documents* were fabrications from the 3rd or 4th century CE, and that they were thus worthless.

From a conceptual perspective, Yan's conclusion is based on the idea that the forger is not identical to the author of the lost original Old Text chapters, and therefore cannot be trusted. This way of thinking is rooted in the narrow concept of authorship. At the same time, however, Yan Ruoqu's findings detail how much the forger had relied on existing traditions that preserved authentic fragments. From there, it was but a small step to the insight that this "forger" was a transmitter instead of a creator. 18th-century scholars only had to transpose Yan's findings into the broad concept of authorship to preserve at least some of the value of the Old Text chapters. As we will see, around the turn of the century, essays softening the verdict of Yan Ruoqu were so numerous that one contemporary feared the return of the specter of Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623-1716), the infamous opponent of Yan and defender of the Old Text chapters.

The writings discussed in this chapter show that the narrow concept of authorship formed the basis for Qing scholars' engagement with transmitted text. While it was pervasive, though, it was not mandatory. Scholars questioned its applicability in theory, or in practice simply went beyond it as they saw fit. Both phenomena, however, only become fully understandable when the narrow concept is posited as the normal mode of approaching transmitted texts. They show that the friction between concept and reality did not go by unnoticed.

Justifying collaborative authorship of early texts

In some works that belong to the genre of "master texts," clear internal boundaries separate distinct layers. The *Mozi* 墨子 contains what could be called a "canon within," the "Mohist Canon" (*Mojing* 墨經) that is worlds apart from the chapters arguing about ghosts and fate in its sophisticated use of highly specialized terminology. The *Zhuangzi* 莊子 is organized in a tripartite structure with its inner, outer and miscellaneous chapters, which is even today used as

a basis for distinguishing authenticity.[131] These works, scholars in the Qing were aware, contained more than just the sayings of Mo Di 墨翟 (5th century BCE) or Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (4th century BCE), the founders of the schools to which these texts belong.

Knowing that many of the transmitted texts had not been put together by their supposed authors, Qing scholars refrained from judging a book by its cover, at least with regard to the name that was written there. In a preface to the *Zhuangzi*, Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1732-1815) stated that there were certainly arbitrary insertions by later people in the 52 chapters that made up this book.[132] The *General Catalog* (*Zongmu* 總目) of the *Complete Library of the Four Categories* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書), by nature concerned with establishing authorship, recognized that the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 was edited by followers of the titular author,[133] and that the *Mozi* contained obvious later additions that could not have been written by Mo Di himself.[134]

For most, it seems, such discrepancies between author-ascription and actual creator did not pose a problem. The relatively low value scholars assigned to these texts is one possible explanation for this. The value assigned to a work within this intellectual order tends to correlate negatively with the amount of skepticism scholars expressed towards it. The weight of tradition kept important works in their place. The defense of the Old Text chapters of the *Documents* which I discuss below is one aspect of this trend. The *General Catalog* of the *Complete Library of the Four Categories* contains minor but telling hints to the same effect.[135] The *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), for example, comes first among the three ritual classics in the catalog and has traditionally been ascribed to the Duke of Zhou 周公. Even as the entry recognizes later insertions and differences with other classics, it affirms this ascription by incorporating these challenges into its narrative of a text that grew over time as the original laws fell out use. In

[131] From the very extensive literature on this topic, two examples of opinions from both sides of the spectrum must suffice: Liu Xiaogan defends a close relationship between the historical Zhuang Zhou and the inner chapters, see his *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1993). As argued by Esther Klein, however, this division may not even have existed in the Western Han 漢 (202 BCE-9 CE) and before, cf. Esther Klein, "Were there 'Inner Chapters' in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*," in *T'oung Pao* 96 (2011), 299-369.

[132] Yao Nai 姚鼐, "Preface and Content of *The Meaning of the Zhuangzi, Chapter by Chapter*" (*Zhuangzi zhangyi xumu* 莊子章義序目), in idem, *The Meaning of the Zhuangzi, Chapter by Chapter*" (*Zhuangzi zhangyi* 莊子章義) (n.p., 1879), *juan shou* 卷首 2a.

[133] Lu Xixiong 陆锡熊 and Sun Shiyi 孙士毅 (eds.), *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu zhengli ben* 欽定四庫全書總目整理本 (Collated Version of the General Catalog of the Imperially Commissioned Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), vol.1, 1316.

[134] Ibid, vol. 1, 1564.

[135] There is no need to assume a unifying editorial hand for the catalog entries. It is probable that different staff members were responsible for each entry analyzed below, which only emphasizes the ubiquitous nature of this tendency.

other words, the challenges to authenticity become the basis of its defense. Had the *Rites of Zhou* been forged, the entry argues, it would be in accordance with the other records from the period when the forger had been active.[136] Given the choice between a sloppy forgery and a corrupted original work, the *General Catalog* opts for the latter. It thereby avoided the need to re-evaluate a work that had become foundational for political thought from a fundamental level: Maintaining the link to the Duke of Zhou indicates that the imperative for scholars was to filter out the later interpolations, not to disregard the text because of its dubious origins. The *Rites of Zhou* had been a classic since the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-906),[137] and it seems likely that the scholars responsible for the *General catalog*, who were additionally working in a project initiated and backed by the state, refrained from questioning the authority such an important work.

The same principle that worked in favor of the *Rites of Zhou* led to different assessments of the *Zuo*, *Gongyang* 公羊 and *Guliang* 穀梁 *Traditions*. The titles of these works are usually understood as containing the names of the founders of these schools, with a tendency to also consider them the authors. The catalog entries on all three texts mention later insertions, offering grounds for doubting the reliability of the standard ascriptions of authorship. How the catalog entries address this question in each case is markedly different, however. The entry on the *Zuo Tradition* declares that, despite the presence of material postdating the death of Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, it retains him as the author "in order to dispel popular doubts."[138] By contrast, the other two works have their author-ascriptions either shifted to a later descendent of the Gongyang clan[139] or deemed unverifiable.[140] The challenges are identical in all cases, and the source material subject to similar restrictions, but the conclusions are diametrically opposed. The only variable is the status of the text. While the *Zuo Tradition* was considered one of the most important works of historiography throughout the history of imperial China, the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* commentaries lingered in comparative obscurity. There is little reason to assume that a challenge to their authorial ascriptions would have encountered serious backlash at that time. On the other hand, a scholarly consensus protected the established knowledge about the *Zuo Tradition*, including its authorship.

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[136] Lu and Sun, *Qinding Siku quanshu zongmu*, vol.1, 235.
[137] Benjamin Elman and Martin Kern, "Introduction," in idem (eds.), *Statecraft and Classical Learning. The* Rituals of Zhou *in East Asian Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1.
[138] 今仍定為左丘明作，以祛衆惑。Lu and Sun, *Siku quanshu zongmu*, vol. 1, 329. The next chapter contains an analysis of some of these "popular doubts."
[139] Ibid, 330.
[140] Ibid, 330.

Whereas scholars showed a tendency to maintain the link of authoritative works to their assumed authors, they treated less important works differently. In the cases mentioned above, this took the form of invalidating their usual author-ascriptions. Scholars less committed to the narrow concept of authorship exploited this comparative lack of stability of the author-text nexus to explore other explanations for why authorship was so difficult to pin down. Therefore, we find that most discussions about more inclusive models of authorship cluster around texts normally held in lower regard.

The frequency with which scholars discovered discrepancies between author-ascriptions and features of the text shows that this was not a niche phenomenon. However, while some were content to disprove author-ascriptions, the same realization drove others to question the feasibility of assigning one author to a text. From doubts concerning the applicability of the single-author paradigm, such deliberations led to the formulation of a model that considered collaborative authorship an acceptable mode of textual production.

The limits of the narrow concept of authorship

Qing Scholars rarely explicitly stated that traditional author-ascriptions were problematic as a principle, not only in individual cases. The examples of Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1752-1818) and Yao Nai show how those who struggled with the narrow concept of authorship articulated their concerns. Especially Yao Nai exemplifies what happened when detailed knowledge of textual history clashed with the requirement to assign one author to each text. His case highlights the difficulty of processing knowledge that does not fit into the model with which one usually makes sense of data.

Judging from his comments on the reliability of early Chinese texts, Sun Xingyan had arranged himself with the realization that forgery was prevalent among them. Few of them could be trusted to reflect the teachings of the persons they claimed to speak for. Evidently, he considered this insight neither startling nor in need of further explanation. Discussing the *Annals of Master Yan* (*Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋), a work whose title links it to Yan Ying 晏嬰, a statesman who lived in the 6th century BCE, he could not have expressed his view in a more sober tone:

> Master Yan's book is a product of the Warring States period [475-221 BCE]. In general, works that are named after a master are for the most part not written by [these men] themselves; there is nothing astonishing about this.[141]
>
> 晏子書成在戰國之世。凡稱子書，多非自著，無足怪者。

Sun considered the distance of more than two centuries separating supposed author and text not worthy of explanation; for him, this seems to have been common knowledge, just like the fact that "half of the outer chapters of the works of the ancients were merely attributed [to them]."[142] In such statements, faith in the reliability of traditional author-ascriptions had reached the nadir. The consequence that Sun drew from this insights was not complete rejection of the texts, however. Sun Xingyan considered forged works so common that he wanted them to be part of basic education. Discussing how to teach "master texts," he proposed to start with the ancient writings and then also include forged works.[143] This suggests that, at the very least, aspiring readers had to be prepared to deal with them. His attitude towards specific cases indicates that he deemed caution necessary in order to distinguish forged from authentic works, though he never elaborated whether this insight should have a more general effect on how scholars approach early texts.[144] What Sun's statements on the topic of authenticity do clearly show is that someone who took the narrow concept of authorship seriously and possessed sufficiently detailed knowledge about the nature of early texts would find himself confronted with many forged works, since knowledge and concept invariably came into conflict.

In contrast to Sun Xingyan's accepting attitude towards forged texts, Yao Nai's essays on this topic hint at a sense of bewilderment. Realizing, like Sun, that something was off with the author-ascriptions of numerous works, Yao attempted to determine whose text he was reading by looking at the history of textual transmission. Talking about the *Zuo Tradition*, a commentary to the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) named after its supposed author Zuo Qiuming, Yao states that "the book by Mister Zuo was not the product of one man."[145] Showing an awareness

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[141] Sun Xingyan, "Yanzi chunqiu xu" 晏子春秋序 (Preface to the *Annals of Master Yan*), in Wang Yunwu 王云五 (ed.), *Sun Yuanru xiansheng quanji* 孫淵如先生全集 (Complete Collection of Mister Sun Xingyan) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 76.

[142] 古人書外篇，半由依托。 Ibid.

[143] 先以古書，附以偽本。 See Sun Xingyan "Sun Zhongmin hou citang cangshu ji" 孫忠愍侯祠堂藏書記 (Inscription for the Book Collection of the Ancestral Temple for Earl Sun Zhongmin [Xingzu 興祖]), in ibid, 224.

[144] See the first section of the following chapter for Sun Xingyan's arguments in favor of a text whose authenticity had been disputed.

[145] 左氏之書非出一人所成。 Yao Nai, "Zuozhuan buzhu xu" 左傳補注序 (Preface to *Additional Commentary to the Zuo Tradition*), in idem, *Xibaoxuan quanji* 惜抱軒全集 (Complete Collection of Yao Nai's Works) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991), 24.

of texts accreting through the addition of new layers, Yao describes the earliest chain of transmission of the *Zuo Tradition* as recorded in early historical works. After listing six people who passed the text on to each other and expanded it, Yao admits that he is unable to draw a distinction between their contributions:

> [These] later generations probably repeatedly added something. Now it is unclear how much of it is the old explanation of the classic by [Zuo] Qiuming, and how much has been added later.[146]
>
> 蓋後人屢有附益。其為邱明說經之舊及為後所益者，今不知孰為多寡矣。

Ancient texts have come down to readers through a number of hands. This process, as pictured by Yao Nai, also affected the content of the text, since it is probable that those who are usually called "transmitters" contributed something to the content. Yao did not elaborate on the nature of or the reasons for the additions he mentions, but there is no question about the result: The text and its history of transmission are fused to such an extent that they have become impossible to distinguish. Despite the presence of later contributions, the text remains linked to the figure of Zuo Qiuming, and there exists no clear indication, apart maybe from chronological hints, who wrote what. Like in the case of Sun Xingyan outlined above, knowledge about the details of the history of textual transmission leads to doubts about the applicability of the narrow concept of authorship. Unlike Sun, however, Yao Nai does not apply the label "forged" to problematic works. In that respect, he goes beyond the narrow concept of authorship that, in principle, treats every text that cannot be traced back to one person as an exception. Yao still remains committed to this concept insofar as he wishes to separate the contributions and trace them to each person, even though he admits defeat before that challenge.

As Yao portrays it, it was a widespread practice of later transmitters of a text to contribute to its content. Besides works like the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi* 列子,[147] it affected even the way the classics were transmitted:

> The origins of all the classics can be traced back to the school of the sage [Confucius], but which of them has not been subjected to willful additions by later scholars? The *Zuo Tradition* is not completely the work of Qiuming; those who follow the Qi-tradition of the *Odes* propose the absurdity that is the theory of the "four beginnings" and "five

[146] Ibid.
[147] Yao Nai, "Ba Liezi" 跋列子 (Postscript to the *Liezi*), in op. cit., 213.

items," but this is not necessarily something that goes back to Yuan Gu [the founder of the Qi-tradition, fl. 2nd century BCE]. Fan Weizong [Ye 曄, author of the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書] says that Wei Hong [1st century CE] wrote the preface to the Mao-recension of the *Odes*; his words must have some basis. To say that the preface is completely by [Wei] Hong or [Yuan] Gu is [nevertheless] not permissible, and how could it be completely by Mister Mao [3rd or 2nd century BCE], or even by Zixia [a disciple of Confucius]?[148]

且諸經之始，孰不原於聖門，而後學者得以意增益？如《左傳》非盡出邱明；言齊《詩》者乃有四始五際之詭誕，未必出於轅固。范蔚宗言衛宏為毛《詩》序，其言必有所從來。謂序盡出於宏、固不可，抑豈盡出於毛公，而況以言子夏乎？

In this dense passage, Yao Nai traces the transmission of the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) through its major early stages. He makes two distinct arguments about the fate of this text. First, the theories of the Qi 齊-tradition about the meaning of the work that Yao introduces as "absurdities"[149] could well be something that had been added later, and not the creation of the founder of this tradition. These interpretative traditions, he implies, changed over time and their founders cannot take the blame for all that their later followers do. Second, the question of who should count as the author of the preface to the *Book of Odes* is a thorny one. Similar to his treatment of the *Zuo Tradition*, Yao lists four contributors, spanning almost half a millennium, whom scholars had connected the transmission of the *Odes* in the long history of research on that topic. Yao wonders whom to consider the author of the preface, and again he can only give a negative answer by saying that none of them is exclusively responsible for the preface as he could read it.

In his deliberations on the composite nature of early texts like the *Zuo Tradition* and the preface to the *Odes*, Yao Nai came up against the limits of the narrow concept of authorship. Basing himself on early records that list the earliest known transmitters, Yao explicitly negates that any *one* of them was the sole creator. It is probable that, parallel to his understanding of the *Zuo*

[148] Yao Nai, *Xibaoxuan biji* 惜抱軒筆記 (Yao Nai's Notebook) (Taibei: Guangwen shuji, 1971), 40.
[149] There are diverging interpretations for the two terms that Yao Nai mentions. The different interpretations of the "four beginnings" all relate to the order of the sections of the *Book of Odes*, while the "five items" either cover the five cardinal human relations or 5 of the 12 earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支). See Jiang Guanghui 姜广辉 and Qiu Mengyan 邱梦严, "Qishi 'sishi wuji' shuo de zhengzhi zhexue jiemi" 齐诗"四始五际"说的政治哲学揭秘 (Exposing the Political Philosophy of the Theory of the "Four Beginnings and Five Items" theory of the Qi-*Odes*), in *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲学研究, vol. 12, 2013, 47-54.

Tradition, he saw the preface as having grown over time thanks to the textual input of those usually called transmitters. Such an accretion, of course, can hardly be squared with the narrow concept of authorship with its requirement of assigning one author to each text. Yao would have needed a different model to make sense of the information available to him. Yet he does not question the narrow concept itself, nor do his writings contain any indication that we was moving towards replacing it with a more appropriate model. Yao's detailed knowledge of textual transmission got him as far as questioning the practical applicability of the narrow concept of authorship, but nowhere beyond that.

Zhang Xuecheng's theory of collaborative authorship

Zhang Xuecheng developed a theory that abandoned the narrow concept of authorship and could explain the evolution of texts of time. In "Words Belong to Everyone" (*Yan gong* 言公), an essay in three parts written around 1783,[150] Zhang portrayed ancient text production as a collaborative enterprise. With this basic assumption, he is in full agreement with both Yao Nai and Sun Xingyan: The fact that a book is named after a certain master does not mean that it was indeed written by him. For Yao, this was an unsettling piece of knowledge, difficult to make sense of in his terms; Sun Xingyan accepted it without further ado. Zhang Xuecheng not only accepted that it was so in ancient times, he even delineated the conditions under which such a system of text production functioned and why it could not have been any other way.

The fame of Zhang Xuecheng rests in no small measure on his knack for stunning openers. The first sentence of his *Comprehensive Meaning of Writing and History* (*Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義) is: "The Six Classics are all history."[151] Much ink has been spilled over the meaning and implication of this statement in relation to Qing dynasty scholarship. Fewer researchers have paid attention to the first part of the *second* sentence that is at least equally significant: "The ancients did not write books, (…)."[152] In the context of the argument he makes in this essay, Zhang puts forward the thesis that in pre-imperial times, no one simply wrote down what came to mind. Rather, principle was always discussed in relation with concrete affairs. This does not mean, however, that the literal meaning of what he says is merely accidental. It rather points to

[150] David Nivison, *The Life and Thought of Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng (1731-1801)* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966), 128.
[151] 六經皆史也 See Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, "Yi jiao shang" 易教上 (The Teaching of the *Changes*, First Part), in Cang Xiuliang 仓修良 (ed.), *Wenshi tongyi xinbian xinzhu* 文史通义新编新注 (Comprehensive Theory of Writing and History Newly Compiled with New Commentary) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2005), 1.
[152] 古人不著書 Ibid.

a central quality of ancient learning as Zhang envisions it: authorship only played a secondary role in its transmission.

In "Words Belong to Everyone," Zhang Xuecheng discusses a wide range of topics that pertain to ancient text production. As they all shape his theory to some degree, it is necessary to give an overview of the most important ideas before working out his conception of authorship. These ideas are (1) the relation between concrete affairs and words, (2) the "identical *dao*" (*tong dao* 同道) as an intellectual condition behind school traditions, and (3) writing as public property that literally belongs to everyone.

For Zhang, words do not float in a vacuum, but are strongly tied to actual affairs. Speaking is a way of doing. According to him, "the ancients did not discuss principle separated from concrete affairs."[153] The example he gives in the essay is instructive:

> The Duke of Zhou said: "The king speaks to the following effect: '[Ho! I make an announcement to you of the four states, and the] numerous [other] regions.'" This is the writing used in announcements to the four states. Those who explain this think that here the Duke of Zhou is taking the mandate of the king for himself; they do not know that these words certainly originate from the Duke of Zhou, and yet, when King Cheng approves of them and puts them into practice, they become the words of King Cheng.[154]
>
> 周公曰："王若曰多方。"誥四國之文也。說者以為周公將王之命，不知斯言固本於周公，成王允而行之，是即成王之言也。

What matters is who puts what has been said into practice, not so much who actually said it. Applying this idea to a passage of the *Documents*, Zhang makes a case for its explanatory value: Acting as a regent for King Cheng, whose father had established a new dynasty but died shortly afterwards, the Duke of Zhou gave a speech in which he referred to himself as the king. He was not overstepping his power, however, as the king subsequently put into practice what these words described and so made these words his own. Words are meant to do something to the world, and the agent is more important than the speaker.

With the "identical *dao*," Zhang Xuecheng refers to an intellectual affinity or "closeness of techniques" (*shu jin* 術近, see quote below) between different thinkers. This principle stands

[153] Ibid.

[154] Zhang Xuecheng, "Yan gong shang" 言公上 (Words Belong to Everyone, First Part), in op. cit., 200. Translation of the *Documents*-citation from James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, volume III, part II: the Shoo King or the Book of Historical Documents* (London: Trübner & Co, 1865), 492.

behind the fact that in some received texts ascribed to certain masters, one finds traces of other thinkers. The examples Zhang gives are not particularly striking for those acquainted with the works he mentions (the *Zhuangzi*, for example, makes little mention of Liezi), but they bring his point across all the same:

> There are also those whose *dao* is identical and technique similar, but whose texts have unfortunately been lost. So they rely on those whose *dao* is identical for their transmission, like the corrupted *Liezi*, half of which can be found in the *Zhuangzi*, or Yang Zhu, whose texts have been lost, but many of his teachings can be found in the *Hanzi*. This is because Zhuangzi and Liezi both originated from the school of *dao* and Yang Zhu's technique for preservation of the self was similar to the school of names and regulations.[155]
>
> 又有道同術近，其書不幸亡逸，藉同道以存者，《列子》殘闕，半述於莊生，楊朱書亡，多存於《韓子》；蓋莊、列同出於道家，而楊朱為我，其術自近名法也。

It is this principle that led to the stories about Liezi being told in the *Zhuangzi*: their *dao* was identical, but unlike Zhuangzi, Liezi did not manage to found his own school. Consequently, his learning appeared in the writings of the school of this similar thinker. Liezi's message was transmitted without having a book dedicated to it. The case of Yang Zhu 楊朱 was similar: The *Han Feizi* 韓非子, a text which Zhang envisions as having originated in a like-minded school tradition, came to his rescue so that his learning did not perish.

With the "identical *dao*," Zhang Xuecheng outlines an intellectual condition that justifies why the learning of different school traditions appear in one work. Just as intellectual circumstances were different in ancient times, so were moral attitudes. The ancients did not write for personal gain, but to spread the *dao*. Therefore, as David Nivison put it, "the right and the true are not yours; they belong to no one, or rather, to everyone."[156] Zhang summarizes this idea in a "chorus" that closes every section in the first part of "Words Belong to Everyone" and opens the whole essay:

> That the words of the ancients belonged to everyone is due to the fact that they were never boastful about writing and selfishly saw it as their private possession.[157]
>
> 古人之言，所以為公也，未嘗矜於文辭，而私據為已有也。

[155] Ibid, 201.
[156] Nivison, *Chang Hsüeh-ch'eng*, 129.
[157] Zhang Xuecheng, "Yan gong shang," 200.

Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910-1998) has aptly translated Zhang Xuecheng's description into modern parlance as "relinquishing copyright."[158] What has been written is available for re-use in any way afterwards. Under such circumstances, learning does not depend on the books in which it is contained, but takes on a life of its own. It manifests itself tangibly in school traditions:

> Since words belong to everyone in the world, the learning contained in books does not instantly vanish when the books get lost at some point. This is because when learning forms a school tradition and gets transmitted over a long period of time, it can be studied and discriminated when people examine it.[159]
>
> 言公於世，則書有時而亡，其學不至遽絕也。蓋學成其家，而流衍者長，觀者考求而能識別也。

The three factors that define authorship for Zhang Xuecheng converge in the concept of the school tradition: People with an identical *dao* come together, and their words belong to the whole group. Furthermore, their words are much more than mere book learning and empty talk, which is why vanishing books do not harm their teachings. The extant "master texts" are products of such circumstances, and these circumstances explain many of their peculiarities.

Zhang elaborates this idea most fully for Han dynasty learning, but his essay strongly suggests the applicability of this model to the earlier "master texts" as well.[160] Indeed, this choice seems to be grounded in the fact that for the Han, actual historical records exist that allow one to trace the development of school traditions. Criticizing, for example, scholars who consider the question-and-answer-format employed in the *Guliang* 穀梁 and *Gongyang* 公羊 commentaries to the *Annals* (which Zhang discusses in the context of Han dynasty school traditions) a mere literary tool, Zhang explains:

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[158] 不擅著作主權 See Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, "Zhang Shizhai yu Suiyuan" 章實齋與隨園 (Zhang Xuecheng and Yuan Mei) in idem, *Tan yi lu* 談藝錄 (Record of Deliberations on Literature) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 266.

[159] Zhang Xuecheng, "Yan gong zhong" 言公中 (Words Belong to Everyone, Second Part), in Cang Xueliang, *Wenshi tongyi*, 207.

[160] Paul Fischer explicitly refrains from crediting Zhang with the theory that "all Masters texts were not written by their titular 'authors.'" While that may be the case, it is beside the point: In my opinion, Zhang outlines a *principle* that was prominent in text production, without claiming that everyone adhered to it. This principle was furthermore not confined to the pre-imperial era, as Zhang's examples from the Han and even the Song indicate. Cf. Paul Fischer, "Authentication Studies (辨偽學) Methodology and the Polymorphous Text Paradigm," in *Early China* 32, 2008-2009, 21n53.

> [But whoever says that] does not know that the ancients gave verbal instructions before they wrote anything on bamboo and silk, unlike the explanations of the classics by later generations, who had to put pen to paper if they wanted to make a name for themselves.[161]
>
> 不知古人先有口耳之授，而後著之竹帛焉，非如後人作經義，苟欲名家，必以著述為功也。

Written texts were merely a secondary product of school traditions as Zhang Xuecheng envisions them, not their mainstay. With this insight, we have come full circle back to the crucial second sentence of Zhang's *Comprehensive Meaning of Writing and History*, which is repeated in "Words Belong to Everyone" in a slightly different form:

> Thus we know that the ancients wrote nothing down, but their words were transmitted all the same.[162]
>
> 是知古人不著書，其言未嘗不傳也。

Looking at "master texts" from this perspective, their features become understandable. Zhang lists a number of examples to illustrate this: In the *Guanzi* 管子, many of the stories told refer to events and persons from a period when Guan Zhong 管仲, the statesman active in the 7th century BCE and presumed author of this work, had long been dead. What might have invited textual criticism in order to distinguish authentic from inauthentic material turns out to be an unproblematic feature of this text. The same is true for the speeches by Li Si 李斯 (3rd century BCE) contained in the *Han Feizi*. Zhang furthermore explicitly rejects certain terminology commonly used to make sense of such findings. Taking issue with Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037-1101) claim that certain chapters of the *Zhuangzi* were "misattributed" (*weituo* 偽托),[163] he points out as a rebuttal that one should rather think of them as "added by students of Mister Zhuang."[164]

Instead of criticizing the hunt for inauthentic elements of his time directly, Zhang Xuecheng questions what counts as inauthentic in the eyes of his contemporaries. He argues that ancient texts have to be viewed as materialized reflections of school traditions that persisted over long

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[161] Zhang Xuecheng, "Yan gong shang," 202-203.
[162] Ibid, 203.
[163] For Su Shi's view of the *Zhuangzi*, see his "Zhuangzi citang ji" 莊子祠堂記 (Inscription for a Sacrificial Shrine for Zhuangzi), in Su Shi 蘇軾 (aut.), Fu Cheng 傅成, Mu Chou 穆儔 (eds.), *Su Shi quanji* 蘇軾全集 (Complete Collection of Su Shi's Works) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2000), vol. 2, 873.
[164] 為莊氏之學者所附益爾。 Ibid, 201.

periods, similar to what Yao Nai claimed for the *Zuo Tradition*. As such, they carry with them the changing concerns of those involved, to the extent that it becomes pointless to distinguish between the words of the teacher and those of the students.[165] Considering that Zhang sees learning as something that has an effect on the world, it would not make much sense if maxims once uttered by a teacher remained the same as if they were sacred. The resulting text, as the materialization of the teachings, mirrors this process with multiple contributors.

Zhang explicitly admits that things like plagiarism and forgery exist, and I will these aspects discuss below with respect to his views on the *Documents*. Even in these cases, however, his view of authorship is highly inclusive. In the case of "master texts," he does not privilege the founder of a school over his disciples, no matter how much time separates them and no matter how great the gap in quality. They are all equal partners in the production of the received text.

That some works are named after a certain figure does not reflect actual authorship, neither in the narrow sense of the scribe nor in the sense of the originator of the content. Rather, the naming practice was a way of honoring the founder of a school tradition who created a specific teaching. Zhang compares this to the chapters in the *Mengzi* 孟子 named after the interlocutors they feature, such as Gaozi 告子 and Wanzhang 萬章.[166] Just as no one ever believed that these chapters were written by either Gaozi or Wanzhang, this comparison implies, it would be absurd to assume that the *Zhuangzi* was written by Zhuang Zhou.

Confronted with authorial ascriptions that were no longer tenable, some scholars, as discussed in the previous chapter, strove to fit the text back into the mold of the supposed author. This entailed proposing changes to the text. Zhang Xuecheng approached the same problem from the opposite direction. Instead of changing the text, he modified the conception of authorship. Taking historical processes of textual development into account, he described collaborative authorship under the banner of a school tradition. Understood in this way, the traditional author ascriptions made new sense. While Zuo Qiuming did not write the whole *Zuo Tradition* himself, he was the founder of a school that handed down his explanations of the *Annals*, and over time, his teachings were expanded. The *Zuo Tradition* in its received version was thus the result of this process, from which it cannot be separated.

Far from being arcane objects passing through time without meeting resistance, texts had a history in the 18th century already, and one that proved be difficult to make sense of with a

[165] 不復辨其孰為師說，孰為徒說也。 Ibid, 203.
[166] Ibid, 201.

narrow conception of authorship. For all we know, however, Zhang's novel proposal did not garner much attention in his own time. Still, when his contemporaries began to re-evaluate the Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents*, they were in basic agreement with Zhang's own pronouncements on that topic. In that discussion, a focus on the textual history instead of the author proved useful for scholars who argued that these chapters, though put together much later than the rest of the *Documents*, contained ample portions of authentic material. They recognized that the forger was not the originator of the content, and this change of perspective made the forger less of a threat. The consensus that emerges from their writings is that condemning the Old Text chapters as forgeries does not do them justice. The realization that the forger was part of a long textual tradition trumps the indignation over the deception.

Author of a forged text: The Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents*

It would be an understatement to say that it is a well-known story how in the early years of the Qing, Yan Ruoqu convinced his contemporaries that the Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents* were forgeries. Rather, modern scholars view it as one of the hallmarks of Qing intellectual history.[167] Though accurate, this narrative at the same time draws attention away from the complex aftermath of this claim. This section tells the story of the aftermath as it unfolded during and shortly after the last decades of the 18th century. In order to put it into perspective, however, a short outline of the textual history of the *Documents* and the developments concerning its authenticity until around 1750 is necessary.

The *Venerated Documents* has a complicated textual history. The *Book of the [Former] Han* notes that the text was burned during the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-210 BCE), but a courageous man identified as Scholar Fu (Fu *sheng* 伏生, 3rd to 2nd century BCE) hid a version in the wall of his home. Some parts of the text were lost in these tumultuous years, but after the fall of the Qin, Fu Sheng taught the remaining chapters to students.[168] This part became known as the New Text (*jinwen* 今文) chapters. The so-called Old Text chapters, on the other hand, were allegedly found in yet another wall, namely that of the supposed former residence of Confucius, when it was about to be torn down. Kong Anguo 孔安國 (2nd to 1st century BCE), a descendant of

[167] Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology. Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*. (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984), 29-32. Edward Shaughnessy, "Shang Shu," in Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts. A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the study of early China, 1993), 376.

[168] See his biography in "Rulin zhuan" 儒林傳 (Biographies of Scholars) in *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 88.3603.

Confucius, got hold of the texts and presented them to the throne. In his recension, there were 16 chapters in addition to the content of the New Text version,[169] which was included with slight variants.

The history of doubts concerning the authenticity of the Old Text chapters is long, dating back to the Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279).[170] The defining moment, of overwhelming importance for all subsequent discussions, was when Yan Ruoqu convinced his contemporaries that the Old Text chapters were a forgery from the 3rd or 4th century CE. Yan made use of a wide array of tools to show that a lot of the received wisdom about them was questionable. Among other things, he compared the number of chapters of the *Documents* listed in earlier works,[171] showed that the story of its presentation to the throne is at odds with the dates of the actors involved,[172] and explained how sentences from different works reappeared in the text of the Old Text chapters.[173] Throughout his analysis, Yan Ruoqu stuck closely to verifiable issues: All of his claims were of a textual nature, and he backed them with an apparatus of quotations.

As Yan traced how these chapters were literally pieced together, he was very vocal about what he thought of their quality. Discussing how *Documents*-quotations from the *Mengzi*, which Yan believed to be from the same chapter of the *Mengzi*, reappeared in two different chapters of the Old Text chapters, he asked: "Does the forger of the Old Text not once again reveal his shortcomings (*pozhan* 破綻)?"[174] Analyzing how a narrative from the *Mengzi* ended up in the Old Text chapters, but with verbal quotations and elements of the narrative mixed up, Yan asked rhetorically: "Is this not getting the meaning of the *Mengzi* wrong?"[175] Yan's identification of the inauthentic nature of the Old Text chapters rests partly on the identification of the mistakes the forger made when he gathered his source material.

For some, Yan's findings were so convincing, they habitually referred to the Old Text chapters as the "forged Old Text" (*wei guwen* 偽古文). Even scholars who did so, however, often had

[169] "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 (Treatise on Literature), in *Hanshu*, 30.1706.
[170] Short but thorough accounts of the history of doubt can be found in the following three studies: Benjamin Elman, "Philosophy (*i-li*) Versus Philology (*k'ao-cheng*). The *jen-hsin tao-hsin* Debate," in *T'oung Pao* 69, nos. 4-5 (1983), 175-222. Michael Nylan, "The *ku wen Documents* in Han Times," in *T'oung Pao* 81, no. 1 (1995), 25-50. Monique Nagel-Angermann, "Das *Diwang shiji* des Huangfu Mi (215-282)," diss. Uni Münster, 1999, 101-116.
[171] Yan Ruoqu 閻若璩, *Shangshu Guwen shuzheng* 尚書古文疏證 (Evidential Analysis of the Old Text *Venerated Documents*) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1987), #1, 35f. (This work is arranged in numbered sections, which I reference in the form of "#X.")
[172] Ibid, #1, 38f.
[173] Ibid, #9, 94-99.
[174] Ibid, #11, 104.
[175] Ibid, #9, 98.

more to say about this text. After Yan's conclusions had become mainstream knowledge by the middle of the 18th century, scholars started to realize that producing something like the Old Text chapters was the result of an effort. They recognized that this effort, which Yan had denigrated, was similar to other modes of textual research. The attitude expressed by Sun Zhizu 孫志祖 (1737-1801) hints at the dilemma by trying to gloss over it: In theory, given the widespread acceptance of Yan Ruoqu's conclusions, there should be nothing left to discuss. In practice, however, the more scholars knew about the background of the forgery, the more questions they could ask.

> The inauthenticity of the Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents* is a settled case by now. There is no need to defend them, and there is no use in attacking them.[176]
>
> 古文《尚書》之偽，至今日而論定，不必回護，亦無庸掊擊。

Is Sun's insistence that the case is closed a statement, or is it a plea? As the following analysis shows, his contemporaries discussed the Old Text chapters at length, and Sun was anything but oblivious to that. Even he himself did not completely refrain from delivering further judgments. While Sun expressly identified the chapters as a forgery by someone from the Wei-Jin 魏晉 period (220-420), he still distinguished between other forged texts and these chapters:

> Forging the Old Text was difficult; forging [ordinary] forged books is easy.[177]
>
> 偽古文難而偽偽書易。

The Old Text chapters were no ordinary forgeries in the eyes of mid-Qing scholars. As part of a canonical classic for more than a millennium, they had taken deep roots in elite culture. Therefore, many were reluctant to discard the Old Text chapters even though they were aware that the work was separated from the period it covered by more than one thousand years. The distinction Sun Zhizu had drawn reflects the smallest common denominator of the period: The label "forgery" may not tell the whole story.

Yao Nai's research on the working method of the forger

Yao Nai's essays about the Old Text chapters reflect this growing interest in the forger's approach and his connections to earlier sources, though they do not contain any softening of

[176] Sun Zhizu 孫志祖, "Nai he" 奈何 ([The Expression] *nai he*), in idem, *Dushu cuolu* 讀書脞錄 (Minor Remarks on Books Read) (Taibei: Guangwen shuju, 1963), 1.9a.
[177] Sun Zhizu, "Mengzi waishu" 孟子外書 (Outer Writings of Mencius), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 2.21b.

the verdict. Like Sun Zhizu, Yao was convinced of the inauthenticity of the chapters, which he said was "abundantly clear" (*da ming* 大明). He identified it as a work from the Eastern Jin dynasty (317-420).[178] All of this did not require further discussion; rather, his dating this work to the Eastern Jin served as the straightforward opening sentence of his preface to Tang Huan's 唐煥 (d. 1789) *Authenticating the Venerable Documents* (*Shangshu bianwei* 尚書辨偽). In such a context, this assertion was certainly appropriate. In other contexts, Yao Nai explored different lines of inquiry that resulted from this conclusion.

In his notes (*biji* 筆記), Yao followed Yan Ruoqu's lead and considered how the forger of the Old Text chapters had worked. Yao argued, for example, that the quotations from the *Documents* found in some Han dynasty works were traces of the authentic Old Text chapters that had once existed. Discussing phrases contained in the Old Text chapters the forger had *not* taken from the *Explanation of Graphs and Analysis of Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字), Yao explained:

> The forger of the Old Text chapters went through all the explanations of the classics, here and there stealing their terms. Only in the case of the *Explanation of Graphs* was he negligent, so what this work quotes is mostly [authentic] Old Text, but the forger did not know how to make use of this.[179]
>
> 作偽古文者，於諸經之訓，皆頗涉獵，雜竊其辭。獨於《說文》荒略，故《說文》引經多係古文，而作偽者不知取茲。

According to Yao Nai's understanding, the Old Text chapters came into existence through the effort to amass passages, all of which were related to the content these chapters were supposed to encompass. The process of forging was thus not one of inventing ancient history, but of piecing it back together. Yan Ruoqu's analysis of the forged text had made it possible for Yao Nai to trace the steps taken in its production further. Yao did so under the premise of forgery and refrained from taking the aspects linking the Old Text chapters to authentic material into consideration.

Discussing a passage in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) that, Yao argued, was from the chapter "Counsels of the Great Yu" (*Da Yu mo* 大禹謨) of the authentic Old Text recension

[178] Yao Nai, "Shangshu bianwei xu" 尚書辨偽序 (Preface to *Authenticating the Venerable Documents*), in idem, *Xibaoxuan quanji*, 193.
[179] Yao Nai, *Xibaoxuan biji*, 10.

of the *Documents*, he again approached forgery from the perspective of textual recycling. His starting point was that the Han dynasty texts *Records of the Historian*, *Book of the [Former] Han* and *Explanation of Graphs and Analysis of Characters* all contained material from the authentic Old Text chapters:

> These three authors [of the works mentioned above] had all really seen the Old Text recension of the "Counsels of the Great Yu" of the *Venerated Documents*. How could the forger of the Old Text "Counsels of Yu" not have seen this? Yet in forging [the works of] ancient people, producing theoretical expositions is rather easy, while producing a narrative is difficult. Therefore, even though he had seen this passage, [the forger] did not dare to use it.[180]
>
> 此三家固皆真見古文《尚書・大禹謨》者也。作偽古文《禹謨》者，豈不見此？然偽作古人，為倫說之辭差易，為序事之辭則難，故雖見此語，而不敢用耳。

Forging is not as easy as it may sometimes seem. True to his practice, the author of the inauthentic Old Text chapters had perused all relevant works for source material on which he could base his text. Yao confidently asserts that the passage in the *Records of the Historian* was no exception, but it proved too difficult to include it. The passage from the *Records* describes the activities and travels of the Great Yu 大禹 when he was controlling the floods. Because the forger could come up with convincing abstract phrases with relative ease, according to Yao, but not with historical and non-contradictory narratives, he left this passage on the Great Yu 大禹 out.

As reconstructed by Yao Nai, the person responsible for the production of the inauthentic Old Text chapters had faced several challenges in his enterprise, not all of which he was able to overcome. The forger had not exhausted the pool of source material as he had overlooked relevant passages from the *Explanation of Graphs* and shied away from trying to construct a narrative out of another passage from the *Records of the Historian*. Yao does not display any sign of sympathy for the forger when he points out what exactly he found despicable about his work and its consequences:

> That the *Venerated Documents* was changed and expanded by the forger of the Old Text [chapters] in order to throw the works of the sage into disorder is indeed appalling.[181]

[180] Ibid, 5.
[181] Ibid, 25.

《尚書》為偽作古文者竄增，以亂聖籍，固可惡矣。

For Yao Nai, the forger is still the *bête noir* that betrayed the trust in the works of the sages and sowed disorder in the teaching. Even though Yao largely followed Yan Ruoqu in his analysis and did not explicitly defend the forger, his repeated references to the genuine fragments highlight the authentic aspects underlying the forged text. Considering the rhetoric employed, Yao Nai stresses the effort and difficulty. This stands in marked contrast to the repeated diatribes against the baseness of the forger that punctuated Yan Ruoqu's analysis. All it takes, however, to go from a description of the working method of the forger to an appraisal of the value of the Old Text chapters is a change of perspective. While Zhang Xuecheng's description of the practice of forging is very similar to Yao's, his assessment of this phenomenon, especially its ethical aspects, was completely different. For Zhang, the forger was in many ways comparable to a philologist.

Zhang Xuecheng and the moral dilemma of the forger

Zhang Xuecheng's position on the issue of forgery is more nuanced than Yao's. Zhang did not completely whitewash the forger and acquit him of all crimes. Yet, as described in the previous section, because Zhang had put so much effort in changing his reader's image of ancient text production and argued for a more inclusive conception of authorship, he was inclined to view the matter in a more differentiated light. To Zhang, the forger was in many respects a scholar of antiquity like many others, intent on preserving the textual heritage; it was only that some of the decisions the forger made were questionable.

Even if words belonged to everyone, there were still limits to taking them from someone else or attributing other's names to one's text. For Zhang, this was a highly charged question.

> When someone takes his own creation and attributes it to one of the ancients, his strongest motivation is to arrogate benefit, and tampering is second to that (…).[182]
>
> 以已之所作偽托古人者，奸利為甚，而好事次之(…)。

What drove someone to forge a text was not, at least not primarily, the desire to throw the teachings of the ancient sages into disorder. Instead of such high-minded and abstract goals, Zhang assumes rather base motivations: such things happened mostly under the spell of power

[182] Zhang Xuecheng, "Yan gong zhong," 207.

and fame. The forger was no evil genius who had a far-reaching agenda he wanted to support with his creation, but an ordinary scholar falling prey to human weakness.

Mei Ze 梅賾 (ca. 4th century), whom Zhang identified as the culprit behind the inauthentic Old Text chapters, was explicitly someone of this kind. His text, according to Zhang, was "created and submitted in response to imperial decrees in order to gain emolument and benefits."[183] As judgment on the forger, this points in two contradictory directions: Is he *merely* a victim of lust for fame and Zhang considers such behavior understandable, or is he so base that such benefits can sway him to commit crimes?

The ambivalence in Zhang Xuecheng's position shows through in virtually all his statements on Mei Ze. He asserts, for example, that the forger, by disgracing the words of the sage, commits a crime for which "even capital punishment does not suffice."[184] Yet he appears to be impressed by the effort the forger put into his work:

> Since the old scriptures were already lost and the forger was collecting and filling lacunae (like the Old Text chapters that have been put together, in which virtually nothing is omitted that appears here and there in other sources), it could well be that one tenth survived [thanks to the work of the "forger"].[185]
>
> 夫墳、典既亡，而作偽者之搜輯補苴，（如古文之採輯逸書，散見於記傳者，幾無遺漏。）亦未必無什一之存也。

The overlap with Yao Nai's discussions on the Old Text chapters is significant, but there are striking differences in perspective. Yao had also traced the way the forger had worked and acknowledged that he had gone through most available sources. Zhang Xuecheng alludes to the same practice, but explicitly commends the possible value such an enterprise can have for later generations, namely that certain text passages from already lost scriptures are kept in circulation. If his statement is stripped to its core assertion, it becomes almost a *contradictio in adiecto*: the forger preserves old texts.

How does this go together with the crimes that deserve capital punishment? The heart of the matter is what the forger, who until this point is indistinguishable from the philologist in his approach to ancient texts, decides to do with the fragments he has collected.

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[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid. The part in round brackets is Zhang's auto-commentary.

> Yet one cannot but feel deep contempt for the forger who still conserves the meaning in adding leftover chapters and remnant sentences to the defective work, but destroys the meaning when he adds to it and turns it into a text.[186]
>
> 然而不能不深惡於作偽者，遺篇逸句，附於闕文，而其義猶存；附會成書，而其義遂亡也。

Zhang Xuecheng envisions two stages that the process of forging entails. First comes the collecting of source material from other texts. This is in itself a highly commendable activity and no different from what a responsible textual critic would do. In the second step, however, the collected fragments are put together to form a new and arguably speculative context. The forger, we are to understand, might add connecting phrases between his collected fragments to link them together or device other means to turn his collection into a coherent text. It is with this step that the forger parts ways with the philologist and does something that is indefensible. In Zhang's words, he "destroys the meaning" of the fragments, most likely by putting them together in unjustifiable ways. The upright philologist would merely add the lost passages he has unearthed to the "defective work," similar to what is nowadays called a critical edition. Driven by his desire for fame and money, however, the forger opts for a definitive version of the text, which he produces himself.

As the difference between forger and philologist is reduced to a single decision late in the process of textual reconstruction, Zhang expresses his hope that the forger rejoins the community of righteous scholars:

> Suppose the forger changed his mind and used his mental capacities to collect and emend. Would his merit be inferior to the *Rituals* of the King of Hejian or the *Documents* of [the lady of] Henei?[187]
>
> 向令易作偽之心力，而以採輯補綴為己功，則功豈下於河間之《禮》，河內之《書》哉？

Liu De 劉德 (d. 129 BCE), King Xian of Hejian 河間獻王, was a famous book collector of the Han dynasty,[188] and the otherwise unknown lady of Henei 河內 is credited with finding lost

[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.
[188] See his biography in the *Book of the [Former] Han*, esp. 53.2410.

chapters, among others from the *Documents*.[189] This is the prospect Zhang Xuecheng holds out for the forger: immortality as a benefactor of literati culture instead of short-term benefits such as fame. Instead of demonizing the forger, Zhang makes a case for seeing even him as a textual critic. The limitation is, however, that the textual critic becomes a "creator of content" at some point by generating meaning on his own; the product he brings into circulation is thus deceptive, even if it is based on authentic source material.

The forger, disappearing behind the history of the text

According to Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (1717-1796), however, the creator of the Old Text chapters never reached the point where he created meaning on his own. Supporting an earlier scholar, Lu made this case in the aptly-titled essay "The Forged Old Text Chapters of the *Venerated Documents* Cannot Be Discarded" (*Wei Shangshu guwen bu ke fei* 偽尚書古文不可廢). Through extensive quotes from a text by Wang Maohong 王懋竑 (1668-1741), Lu explains where the value of the chapters lies, even while he expressly labels them a forgery in the title of his own essay. The following is the central part of what he quotes from Wang Maohong:

> At that time, the chaos of the Yongjia-period [the fall of the capital of the Jin dynasty in 311 CE] had not yet taken place and the old texts were for the most part still extant. Plucking and compiling [from them], no character [in the Old Text chapters that were thus created] does not have a basis. It is only that the style of writing is weak, the phrases are not connected and the historical events do not match. Even though it is clear that they are not authentic, they still contain many guidelines and great lessons from the ancient sages.[190]
>
> 其時未經永嘉之亂，古書多在。採摭綴緝，無一字無所本。特其文氣緩弱，又辭意不相連，屬時事不相對。值有以識其非真，而古聖賢之格言、大訓往往在焉。

[189] See Wang Chong 王充, "Zheng shuo" 正說 (Correcting Theories), in *Lunheng* 論衡 (Balanced Discourses) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1990), 256.

[190] Lu Wenchao 盧文弨, "Wei Shangshu guwen bu ke fei" 偽尚書古文不可廢 (The Forged Old Text Chapters of the *Venerated Documents* Cannot Be Discarded), in idem, *Longcheng zhaji* 龍城札記 (Reading Notes Taken in Longcheng) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 126. The original quote is from Wang Maohong 王懋竑, "Shangshu xulu" 尚書叙錄 (Record of Explanations on the *Venerated Documents*), in idem, *Baitian zazhu* 白田雜著 (*Miscellaneous writings by Wang Maohong*) (Taibei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), 1.14b.

In his essay, Lu Wenchao does little more than express his full agreement with this quotation. According to this depiction, the forger, though limited in his literary abilities and uncertain grasp of chronology, still transmits the authentic sayings of the sages. This alone is enough to justify his actions. Wang Maohong's argument, which Lu Wenchao fully supports, is that the forger is a translucent and negligible part of the transmission history of the *Documents*. Because he did not interfere with the crucial parts of the text, the forger does not have the power to harm the teaching of the sages. While the use of the sagely teachings as an argument in defense of the Old Text chapters had fallen out of favor by the end of the 18th century, the position Lu expresses in his essay by quoting Wang is fairly typical for the time, derivative as it may be.

By emphasizing historical circumstances over the will to deceive, scholars could present the Old Text chapters as valuable documents, without taking recourse to the sagely wisdom they supposedly preserved. In this regard, Wang Mingsheng's 王鳴盛 (1722-1797) approach was much more in line with the scholarly predilections of his time. Based on a plethora of sources, Wang traced how and why these chapters were produced, and constructed a narrative that replaced the will to deceive with a laudable intention. According to him, his contemporaries missed the point in their oversimplified discussions of the authenticity of this work:

> Since time immemorial, the case of the Old and New [Text chapters] of the *Venerated Documents* has not been laid to rest. Those who believe in the version that has been submitted by Mei Ze in the late Jin dynasty are all ignorant, base Confucians. Those who doubt it say: "The *Documents* consists only of the 28 New Text chapters, and what had been obtained from the wall of Confucius's [house] was lost during the witchcraft upheaval.[191] The version by Mei [Ze] has been falsely attributed by later generations." These discussions completely miss the point of the issue of authenticity.[192]
>
> 《尚書》古今文，千古聚訟不休。其信晚晉梅賾所獻本者，皆無識陋儒。即有疑之者直云："《書》止今文二十八篇，而孔壁所得，遭巫蠱之難，遂以失傳，梅本乃後人假託。"此等議論，于真偽之辨，全不能得其要領。

[191] "Witchcraft upheaval" refers to a violent power struggle in 91 BCE during which the crown prince of the Han imperial house was killed; the name derives from the fact that the emperor felt threatened by sorcerers and purges were carried out that became part of the power struggle.

[192] Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛, "Shangshu gu jin wen" 尚書古今文 (The Old and New Text [Chapters] of the *Venerated Documents*), in idem, *Yi shu bian* 蛾術編 (Compilation of Scholarship Accumulated in an Ant-Like Fashion) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958), 67.

Wang Mingsheng sketches two extreme positions concerning the authenticity of the Old Text chapters. On the one hand, there are the unwavering believers, and on the other hand, there are those who completely disregard them. While the second group, in its theories highly reminiscent of Yan Ruoqu, is able to trace the transmission history of the chapters to back any claims for inauthenticity and is thus, by implication, not as "base" as the faction of believers, they too do not get to the heart of the matter.

As Wang sees it, a number of different factors came together to produce the Old Text chapters, and these factors are not reducible to the concept of forgery. As he tells it, the story of the questionable chapters is one of an attempted revival of tradition, factional struggles and textual loss through war. If there was any intention to deceive on the side of the creator, Wang minimizes it as much as possible in his account:

> Huangfu Mi was influential in the early years of the Jin dynasty. Seeing that this learning [of Kong Anguo] was about to vanish, he engaged in changing and creating, and furthermore acted in place of Anguo in creating a commentary. This is the current version. He thought that if there were a commentary by Anguo, then [the traditions of] Ma [Rong] and Zheng [Xuan] would be suppressed. Shortly afterwards, there was the chaos of the Yongjia-period, and the authentic Old Text [chapters] were unexpectedly lost.[193]
>
> 皇甫謐名重晉初，見此學之將絕也，遂別為改作，且代安國為傳，即今本也。其意以有安國傳，則馬、鄭必為所壓伏耳。未幾而永嘉喪亂，真古文果亡。

According to Wang Mingsheng, Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215-282) acted out of sympathy for the school tradition of Kong Anguo, whose fortune was in steep decline in Huangfu's time, when he produced the Old Text chapters. Wang's wording is vague, and purposely so, one can surmise: Huangfu engaged in "changing and creating" (*gai zuo* 改作) the text and "acted in place of" (*dai* 代) Kong Anguo when he wrote the commentary that was in the 18th century widely believed to be forged as well. Unlike forging, terming it "acting in place" implies the right to work in the name of someone else. Given the circumstances, Huangfu Mi did something commendable when he tried to save the learning of Kong Anguo from falling into oblivion by writing the commentary. That he at the same time intended to use this work to attack the

[193] Ibid, 68.

authority of other commentators serves, however, to scale back the good impression Wang Mingsheng gives.

Beyond this ambivalence, there is also a gap in the story as Wang tells it. If only the commentary is truly the work of Huangfu Mi's hands and the Old Text chapters are authentic, Huangfu's changes to the text must have been very severe. How else could Wang justify saying that the authentic chapters were lost in the chaos surrounding the fall of the Jin dynastic capital? It is likely that when Wang spoke of "changing and creating," he had the very same textual operations in mind that others referred to as "forging."

Just like adverse circumstances led to the replacement of the authentic chapters with a "rearranged" version, they forced the Tang 唐 (618-906) scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) to comment on the inauthentic Old Text chapters in order to not jeopardize the authority of the *Correct Meaning of the Five Classics* (*Wujing* 五經正義) project:

> The forged version became current south of the Yangtze Delta; Liu Zhuo and Liu Xuan of the Sui dynasty [581-618] trusted in it and produced a sub-commentary, for which they became famous near and far. If Yingda relied on Zheng [Xuan], he would lack a commentary for half of the classic, and who would then still trust and follow him? He had no choice but to use the forged version [as his source text to comment upon].[194]
>
> 蓋偽本始盛于江左，至隋劉焯、劉炫尊信作疏，聲燄大張。穎達倘依鄭，則經且少其半，孰信而從之？不得已用偽本。

As Wang tells the story, once the inauthentic Old Text chapters had gained momentum and were widely held to be authentic, everyone who slighted them ran the risk of becoming the laughing stock of the scholarly world. It was decidedly not the fault of Kong Yingda that they were honored with a place in the *Correct Meaning* project. Rather, Kong did not have a choice because all of his contemporaries put their faith in the Old Text chapters.[195] Thus, through a series of unfortunate circumstances and events, this inauthentic work became part of the influential state-sponsored compilation of canonical texts. No one participant had intended it, but the Old Text chapters made their way through the centuries and the hands of perceptive scholars all the same. Reducing this process to the term "forgery" is something Wang

[194] Ibid, 69.
[195] This was probably a direct response to Yan Ruoqu, who faulted Kong Yingda for lending the Old Text chapters credibility. See Yan Ruoqu, *Shangshu guwen shuzheng*, #17, 135.

Mingsheng finds questionable. Rather, according to his reading of the data, no one intended the deception, probably not even the creator of the inauthentic text.

Wang Mingsheng does not deny that these chapters are spurious. By focusing on the intention of Huangfu Mi, the man he considers responsible for the received text, Wang strives to show what value they could still possess. Yet he is still ambivalent in his judgment, as can be gathered from his contradicting terminology: The Old Text chapters are inauthentic, but what Huangfu did was "changing and creating," which suggests some sort of foundation. Huangfu furthermore worked to preserve learning, a cause towards which Wang must have been sympathetic, at least in principle. In the end, Wang leaves the question to what extent Huangfu Mi is a dubious character unanswered. Given all the background information Wang Mingsheng gathers in order to explain the behavior of all historical actors involved, it seems that he considers Huangfu first a victim of adverse circumstances and only then a shady figure. As Wang implies with his approach, the Old Text chapters, though inauthentic, are something scholars should study closely, instead of just dismissing them as forged. As he sees it, there is a wide spectrum that is poorly covered by the dichotomy of "authentic - forged."

Zhao Yi's defense of the Old Text chapters

Compared to the careful re-appraisals of the Old Text chapters analyzed so far, the strategy Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1814) employs to defend their value drops all restraint. Zhao attacks the attackers. For this, he traces the doubts about the authenticity back to their origins in the Song. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) had wondered why the Old Text part of the *Documents* was so easy to read when, according to common sense and reading experience, it should be much more difficult than the New Text chapters.[196] The more archaic the language, the less accessible it should be. Zhao Yi also refers to Zhu Xi and Wu Cheng 吳澄 (1249-1333), who both had commented on the differences between the language of the Old Text chapters and other early texts.[197] In a sweeping generalization, he reduces all subsequent attacks on the authenticity of the chapters to the difficulty of reading them:

[196] "Shangshu yi, gangling" 尚書一綱領 (Venerated Documents, Part One, Generalities), in Wang Xingxian 王星賢 (ed.), *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Classified Sayings of Master Zhu) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 1978.
[197] Zhao Yi 趙翼, "Song ru yi Guwen Shangshu" 宋儒疑古文尚書 (The Doubts of Song Confucians Concerning the Old Text *Venerated Documents*) in idem, *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 (Various Studies Written While Caring for my Parents) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990), 7f.

> Since these three theories have been in circulation, everyone was making a fuss, but [what they said] does not go beyond the two questions "Why is the Old Text easy to read? Why is the New Text difficult to read?"[198]
>
> 自此三說行，而後人附和紛紛，大概不越乎"古文何以皆易讀"、"今文何以皆難讀"二語。

As has become clear in the course of this section, the difficulty of the parts did not play a central role in the discussion. While this point might have given rise to the initial suspicions, scholars made the substantial arguments based on other aspects of the Old Text chapters, most prominently their textual history. Identifying the readability of the chapters as their Achilles' heel, Zhao Yi's goal is to prepare the ground for his defense, namely an explanation why this text is easier to read than its supposedly younger counterpart.

Ironically, Zhao too defends the Old Text chapters based on their textual history. He buttresses his claims with quotations from the *Records of the Historian* and the preface to the *Documents* ostensibly by Kong Anguo. In the "Biographies of Scholars" (*Rulin zhuan* 儒林傳) chapter in the *Records*, it says that "Anguo used current script to read" the chapters discovered in the wall of the Kong mansion.[199] In the preface to the *Documents*, it says that because no one knew how to read the tadpole script (*kedou shu* 科斗書) in which these chapters were written, the New Text chapters were used to "ascertain the meaning of the writing" (*kao lun wen yi* 考論文義).[200] Taken together, Zhao asserts, these two statements make clear why the Old Text chapters are so readable:

> Seen from this perspective, it is because Anguo simply did not know the old script that he used Fu Sheng's version in new script as a comparison, and he guessed the characters based on the content of this version. When the old script parts were deciphered, he used

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[198] Ibid, 8.

[199] 孔氏有古文《尚書》，而安國以今文讀之。"Rulin zhuan" 儒林傳 (Biographies of Scholars), in *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 121.3215. Hong Bosheng 洪博昇 has argued recently that the character *du* 讀 should be understood as "interpret" (*chouyi* 抽繹) in this case and commends Zhao Yi for his perceptive remarks. See his "Cong Duan Yucai dui du zi de xunjie, tan Kong Anguo yi jinwen zi du Guwen Shangshu de xiangguan wenti" 從段玉裁對讀字的訓解，談孔安國以今文字讀《古文尚書》的相關問題 (Discussing Questions Related to Kong Anguo's Reading of the Old Text Documents with New Text Characters, Based on Duan Yucai's Explanation of the Character *Du* [Read]), in *Shixin Zhongwen yanjiu jikan* 世新中文研究集刊, no 6, 2010, 195-226.

[200] "Shangshu xu" 尚書序 (Preface to the *Venerated Documents*), in *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (Correct Meaning of the *Venerated Documents*), in Li Xueqin 李學勤 et. al. (eds.), *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben* 十三經注疏整理本 (Collated Version of the Thirteen Classics with Commentary and Subcommentary) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol. 2, 17a.

> the characters shared by the new and old script versions to read the parts that were missing in the new script version. Where there were [gaps in the narrative because of] something left unrecognized, he bridged them based on the meaning of the text.[201]
>
> 由此以觀，是安國本不識古文，以伏生之今文對讀，始以意揣而識其字。既識古文，則今文所無者，即以今文、古文相同之字讀之。間有不識者，則以文義貫穿之。

Building on his claim that the only thing that casts doubt on the Old Text chapters is that they are easy to read, Zhao Yi develops his defense by portraying Kong Anguo as a scholar that had faced many difficulties. Kong, widely accepted as having submitted the lost authentic Old Text chapters to the throne, was unable to read the text found in the wall of Confucius's home because he did not recognize the obsolete characters in which it was written. According to Zhao, Kong therefore relied on the content of the New Text version to decipher the Old Text chapters. What he could not read, Kong surmised based on the content in order to bind together the passages he had figured out. Thus, the text was simplified in the process of translation into a readable script. This simplification was unavoidable as the content was inaccessible and had to be re-created based on conjecture. Therefore, in a sense overlooked by others, Zhao Yi argued that Kong Anguo was the creator of the Old Text chapters because Kong was at least partly responsible for the content of the text. Far from being a forger, however, he had tried to save this oblique text written in an obsolete script from being forgotten.

In the version of the story Zhao Yi develops, the manner in which the forger had worked according to Yan Ruoqu is left intact, but agent and motivation are different. Yan had argued that for every phrase in the inauthentic text, there is a source in other texts (*ju ju you ben* 句句有本).[202] The forger just had to put them together to form a text. Zhao Yi accepts that the Old Text chapters were produced in this way, but under entirely different circumstances. First of all, it was not a forger, but Kong Anguo who had put the text together in this manner. His sources were also not disparate texts, but the actual Old Text version of the *Documents* found in a wall. For this reason, the Old Text chapters are closely connected to the authentic line of transmission. In short, Zhao does not deny that there was a rupture in the transmission history of this text. He rather argues that this rupture has been misunderstood.

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[201] Zhao Yi, "Song ru yi Guwen Shangshu," 8.
[202] As seen in the title for, among others, section 33, which was part of the third *juan* that is not extant but listed in the table of contents. Cf. Yan Ruoqu, *Shangshu guwen shuzheng*, 19.

Zhao Yi does not mention other aspects that made the chapters look dubious, like the discrepancies in its transmission history as recorded in the *Book of the [Former] Han*. By declaring the quality of the transmitted text to be the defining aspect, Zhao rhetorically eliminates the necessity to take them into account. It only mattered that the text is so easy to read and seemingly the product of a single hand. Zhao's theory of how the Old Text chapters were produced indeed offers solutions for both problems and clears the work of all charges of inauthenticity coming from this particular direction. Zhao is also bold enough to deride the accusers when he claims that they are merely captivated because they do not understand the obscure phrasing of the New Text version. And cherishing something only because one does not understand it, he says, cannot be considered very reasonable.[203]

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, Sun Zhizu called the Old Text chapters of the *Documents* a settled case. Judging from the elaborate theories discussed so far, we have to read this not as a description of reality, but as a plea. Since Sun lacked the power to enforce an agenda upon his contemporaries, however, all he could do was to lament the state of affairs with biting irony:

> If Mao Qiling were still alive, he would most certainly produce an *Extension of the Defense* [*of the Old Text version of the Venerated Documents*]![204]
>
> 使毛西河至今存，必有《續寃詞》之作矣。

In the eyes of Sun Zhizu, scholars in the late 18th century were drifting away from the conclusions of Yan Ruoqu and moving towards the attitude of Mao Qiling, who had written a defense of the Old Text chapters in which he attacked the arguments brought forward by Yan. Sun, it should be noted, did not have a high opinion of Mao Qiling.[205] In this case, Sun used him as a symbol for the tendency to write about the Old Text chapters in an apologetic manner and defend them to various degrees. The above quote was his way of expressing his disdain about this shift in attention.

The findings of Yan Ruoqu, as well as those by others like Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697-1758) and Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1816) who expanded and confirmed the former's research, did not mark

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[203] 今因其艱濕不可解，遂謂之古奧而深信之，此更非通論語矣。 Zhao Yi, "Song ru yi Guwen Shangshu," 10.
[204] Sun Zhizu, "Nai he," 1.9a.
[205] See for example Sun Zhizu, "Can yue tiao sang" 蠶月條桑 ("In the Silkworm Month They Strip the Mulberry Branches of the Leaves"), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 1.19b.

the end of the debate.[206] Rather, they provided the data for different interpretations and thus were the starting point for new discussions. Ironically, the approach used by Yan Ruoqu to prove the inauthenticity of the Old Text chapters could also be employed to argue for its value: By going through the early references to this version, Yan had stressed the transmission history as an important factor in showing its spuriousness. Scholars like Yao Nai, Zhang Xuecheng and Wang Mingsheng followed suit, but they found in the transmission history the very factor that showed that the Old Text chapters were closely linked with and the product of a tradition that stretched back into the Han dynasty. In different ways, Zhang and Wang furthermore presented the person who had produced these chapters as a scholar who cared about the tradition.

In keeping with the established picture of 18th-century scholarship, in all the cases analyzed above textually verifiable aspects were the final arbiters of truth. Instead of arguing for the validity of the principles espoused by the Old Text chapters, everyone accepted that the controversy had to be decided on the field of textual and historical studies. Yan Ruoqu had set the parameters and no one deviated from them, even if Yan's conclusions were doubted. The crucial part of all arguments was that the creator of the Old Text chapters had pieced his work together from earlier sources. This was exactly how Yan Ruoqu had identified it as inauthentic. But seen from another angle, it also placed the "forger" in a longer line of transmission. The more this aspect of the text's creation was stressed, the less dangerous the Old Text chapters appeared. In some respects, it seems as if Qing scholars, aware of the painstaking reconstructions of lost texts prevalent in their own time, developed sympathy for the "forger." Even if there was a consensus that the Old Text chapters were not authentic,[207] there were other ways to defend their value.

Conclusion

Besides being an incentive for textual scholarship, the narrow concept of authorship also gave rise to critical reflection in the 18th century. Instead of simply applying it in their research, scholars questioned its validity based on the fundamental re-evaluation of the textual heritage that it mandated: Maybe it was not the fault of the early works that Qing scholars found every author-ascription problematic. Maybe they just looked at them from the wrong perspective. This is the basic tension described in the first section. After two millennia, the reason why the

[206] For their studies of the Documents, see Benjamin Elman, "Philosophy (*I-li*) Versus Philology (*k'ao-cheng*). The jen-hsin tao-hsin Debate," in *T'oung Pao* 69, 4-5 (1983), 175-222, esp. 211ff.
[207] Elman, "Philosophy Versus Philology," 213.

name of a figure had been chosen as the title of a book were no longer clear, and these titles became a source of confusion. In order to overcome this confusion, Zhang Xuecheng argued that in pre-imperial China, teachings were transmitted orally over long periods of time, while written records were less important. The name of the originator of these teachings was closely linked with the dynamic oral transmission, but less so with the written record that appeared at some point. Text production, according to Zhang, was a process that stretched over decades, if not centuries, during which teachings gestated and were reshaped over and over before being fixed. Tying the text that resulted from this process to the initial historical figure was bound to be misleading.

In a comparable manner, the contemporary discussion about the Old Text chapters of the *Documents* shifted the focus towards the textual history. This case, however, was more complex because the claim for inauthenticity was one of the defining events of the period,[208] and due to the canonical status of the work. Accordingly, scholars who defended the Old Text chapters usually treaded more carefully, yet the tendency to highlight their value remains unmistakable. This was achieved by embedding the inauthentic parts in a textual history that stretched back at least to the 1st century BCE, when the authentic version was supposedly still in circulation. Looking at Yan Ruoqu's discrediting of the Old Text material through the eyes of his 18th-century readers brings out a tension inherent in his work. Yan's concrete findings indicate that the "forger" may have just pasted existing parts together, so his creative role may have been very limited. However, Yan, who repeatedly uses the term "forger" (*zuoweizhe* 作偽者), emphasizes the aspect of creation in his conclusions. In other words, for him the forger was the creator of the forged text in the full sense of the word. At the end of the 18th century, Yan's conclusions still mattered, but the textual overlap he had uncovered attracted even more attention. Consequently, the role of the forger was reduced to that of an editor who, based on existing material, assembled rather than created. If forgery, strictly defined, is speaking in the voice of someone else and pretending to be that person, then scholars no longer accepted it as an accurate description of the historical events. Yan's fuzzy use of the concept haunted the reception of his textual scholarship.

The concern that binds these deliberations about "master texts" and *Documents*-chapters together is the classificatory function of authorship. The figure of the author situates the text

[208] Jiang Fan 江藩 (1761-1831), for example, gives pride of place to Yan Ruoqu as the first scholar treated in his *Guochao Hanxue shicheng ji* 國朝漢學師承記 (Record of Han Learning School Traditions in the Qing Dynasty) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937) and quotes at length from Yan's writings on the *Documents*. Ibid, 6-11.

that is ascribed to him. If the Old Text chapters were solely linked to someone from the 3rd or 4th century CE, then their description of events from a millennium earlier is at best of dubious value, supposing as Qing scholars did that time corrodes knowledge. The same holds true for works like the *Zhuangzi* and the *Mozi*. To what extent could they be relied upon given the obvious distance between the figures they described and the time in which they were composed?

It lies in the nature of the question that no consistent answer existed. How scholars coped with this problem remained an issue of personal preference. However, we can identify some general tendencies. There was a significant difference between works at the center and those at the periphery of the textual heritage. While scholars zealously sifted through the *Analects* to determine Confucius's authentic teachings, it mattered little that the *Guanzi* consisted at least partly of later material. The intellectual order built around the canon influenced where scholars applied their philological tools.

When the narrow concept of authorship dominated the philological discourse, scholars began to recognize its deficiencies. The alternative they developed was to take a closer look at the transmission of a text, instead of focusing on the one moment where the text was supposedly created. As a fundamental challenge to the binary distinction between forged and authentic, scholars who subscribed to this approach argued that calling someone a "forger" is misunderstanding how textual production functioned in pre-imperial times.

3. Connecting the dots: Textual filiations as interpretation

In the previous two chapters, I have already discussed how the relationship between text and author became a focus of attention in the 18th century. For most scholars, the author was the source of authority for a text. A text whose authorship was in doubt was in danger of becoming worthless. Within this framework, scholars could make intricate and powerful statements about a certain text by either questioning or affirming its authorship.

While it was not equally central, scholars also looked into the relationship between an author and the intellectual world of his times. By assigning him to a certain school or portraying him as a disciple of someone else, Qing scholars indirectly expressed how the text of the author in question should be read. In a period when Confucius 孔子 (trad. 551-479 BCE) was regarded as the source of all acceptable learning, scholars were often preoccupied with how closely related an author was to this figure. Conversely, where this connection was questioned, the text faced a loss of status. Assigning an author to an intellectual lineage functioned both as a guide to interpretation and as a determinant of centrality.

What made this issue more pressing in the 18th century was the renewed interest in the masters (*zhu zi* 諸子) of lesser status. The masters were the supposed authors of many pre-imperial texts that belonged to intellectual lineages other than that of Confucius. Assigning these authors and their works a place within the spectrum of known schools was an important task for the scholars who worked on these texts, as it could justify why such studies mattered.[209]

The attention that scholars of the 18th century paid to the intellectual lineage to which an author belonged underlines that for them, a text became legible through its author, either through the author-text-nexus, or through the author-lineage-nexus. Ideally, a text had an author, and that author was linked to an intellectual lineage. The cases where either of those connections remained in doubt gave rise to the most heated philological discussions of the period, and this chapter will focus on the establishment of textual filiations as expressed through master-disciple-relationships between author-figures.

[209] These schools probably do not accurately reflect pre-imperial developments in intellectual history, but are retrospect constructions from the end of the 2nd century BCE. See Kidder Smith, "Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, 'Legalism,' et cetera," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2003, 129-156.

Historical reconstructions of authorial biographies can easily be dismissed as having naïvely assumed that concrete narratives and literary topics found within the œuvre must be reflective of the author's life. Such an approach has come to be called the "biographical fallacy." Alexander Beecroft, who has extensively studied early anecdotes about the lives of writers, has argued that a wholesale dismissal of these sources has come to constitute what he labels the "reverse biographical fallacy," by which he means "the modern tendency to read all ancient biographical anecdotes as if they had been constructed according to the biographical fallacy (...)."[210] Instead, he proposes to understand biographies as devices that were used to express literary theory. While Qing scholars hardly ever engaged with extensive biographical anecdotes, and much less reconstructed complete biographies, their forays in this direction too were devices meant to express interpretative insights and guidelines.

Attempts to order texts through their authors have a long history in China, and found what was probably their most influential expression in the grouping of the Four Books (s*ishu* 四書) in the Southern Song 宋 dynasty (1127-1279). Two of these, the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) and the *Mengzi* 孟子, were books that had been held in high regard for centuries. The other two, the "Great Learning" (*Daxue* 大學) and the "Middle and the Mean" (*Zhongyong* 中庸), were chapters of the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), and had seldom attracted much attention. This began to change early in the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), when scholars discovered them as answers to then-current questions about human nature and self-cultivation. Taking these two chapters out of their original context and establishing them as separate treatises, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) assigned them "an authorial pedigree that could not but inspire genuine awe and respect."[211] The "Great Learning," Zhu Xi claimed, consisted of a classic by Confucius himself and a commentary based on the ideas of his direct disciple Zengzi 曾子, whereas the "Middle and the Mean" had been written by Zisi 子思, grandson of Confucius and indirect teacher of Mengzi. According to this genealogy, the Four Books covered the whole development of classical Confucian teachings, which constituted a strong argument for their cohesiveness and their significance.

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[210] Alexander Beecroft, *Authorship and Cultural Identity in Early Greece and China. Patterns of Literary Circulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

[211] Daniel Gardner, *The Four Books: The Basic Teachings of the Later Confucian Tradition* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), xxiv-xxv. For a more detailed analysis of the reactions to Zhu Xi's proposals, see Christian Soffel and Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Cultural Authority and Political Culture in China. Exploring Issues with the "Zhongyong" and the "Daotong" during the Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasties* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2012), 54-86.

As far as we can tell, Zhu Xi did not discover that the "Middle and the Mean" had been written by Zisi and began to enjoy reading it afterwards. Rather, like many of his contemporaries, Zhu was fond of that text and expressed this respect through an author-ascription that was not rooted in transmitted knowledge, and that his later detractors accordingly called into question. The fact that the relations he assumed between the authors were commonly accepted facilitated Zhu's task, whereas the relation between author and text was unsettled. This was different in the cases to be analyzed below, though the basic approach is the same: Scholars who discussed the figure of the author often did so in order to discuss the text associated with him. The focus, however, was not on the connection between author and text, but on the relation of the author-figure to another historical figure.

The first section of this chapter discusses the case of the *Annals of Master Yan* (*Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋), a collection of anecdotes and dialogs whose name links it to the statesman Yan Ying 晏嬰 (c. 6th century BCE). Since the 9th century, Chinese scholars considered this work to belong to the Mohist school of thought, and they regarded it as not worthy of study.[212] When some Qing scholars developed an interest in the *Annals of Master Yan*, they had to confront an intellectual mainstream that was not sympathetic towards their research. They met this challenge by arguing that on a personal level, Yan Ying was on good terms with Confucius, and from that they deduced that the teachings of both men were in general agreement. By doing so, scholars dealt with abstract, doctrinal problems on the concrete level of biography.

While the fate of the *Annals of Master Yan* remained a marginal issue in the 18th century, the second section of this chapter deals with a discussion that took aim at a pillar of both historical knowledge and Confucian doctrine. As a guide to the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳) was a classic in its own right and a work that Qing scholars held in high regard. Traditionally, Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 was accepted as its author, and early sources contained stories about his close collaboration with Confucius. This biographical connection was crucial for anyone who evaluated the *Zuo Tradition*: Depending on their view of the text, scholars formulated different versions of Zuo Qiuming's story. These versions reflect how reliable they considered the *Zuo Tradition* to be.

In a discourse where texts depended on their authors, some authors could not guarantee authority on their own, but depended themselves on another person. Scholars manipulated the

[212] Olivia Milburn, *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 48-49.

relation between these two historical figures in a manner that correlated closely with their view on the value of the text. While this approach already had a long history in the Qing dynasty, its vitality indicates that scholars constantly re-evaluated the status of texts through their author-ascription. Within the context of Qing dynasty scholarship in general, the following analysis further attests to the central role of the author-figure as an organizing principle for the textual heritage. Whatever they wanted to say, scholars could (and often did) say it through the author.[213]

Master Yan, Master Mo and Master Kong

The *Annals of Master Yan* is a collection of anecdotes and dialogs whose name links it to the statesman Yan Ying. Its present form owes much to the editorial work undertaken by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE) at the imperial library; however, modern archaeological findings confirm that a written tradition of stories about Yan Ying existed at least by the end of the second century BCE, probably even more than a century earlier.[214]

In the "Treatise on Literature" (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志) of the *Book of the [Former] Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), a work with the title *Master Yan* (*Yanzi*) is listed as a Confucian text (*Ru jia* 儒家). It ranks first in a list of many illustrious texts bearing the names of Confucius's direct disciples and Mengzi. Despite such favorable treatment in the *Book of the [Former] Han*, the *Annals of Master Yan*, assuming it is indeed identical to the *Master Yan*, seems to not have attracted commentators, as no commentary is known to have existed. Such scholarly neglect was cemented in the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-907) when Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) argued that the text was written by a "follower of Mozi" (*Mozi zhi tu* 墨子之徒) and should be classified accordingly. Liu argued that many of the positions expressed in the *Annals* are consistent with those of Mozi and stand in stark contrast to those of Confucius. He did not make a point about the authenticity of the text; rather, Liu expressed the belief that Yan Ying fit quite naturally into the Mohist narrative of frugality and egalitarianism.[215] Reassigning this text from the Confucian

[213] These are cases of what Michel Foucault has called "the complex operations that construct a certain rational being that one calls author." See Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in idem, *Dits et écrits 1: 1954-1969* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 800-801.

[214] Milburn, *Annals of Master Yan*, 3-17. The tomb in which the manuscript was found was closed during the reign of Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141-87 BCE), though the bamboo text with the stories about Master Yan is considered to be significantly older.

[215] Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, "Bian Yanzi chunqiu" 辨晏子春秋 (Examining the *Annals of Master Yan*), in Yi Xinding 易新鼎 and Mu Gengcai 母庚才 (eds.), *Liu Zongyuan ji* 柳宗元集 (Collection of Liu Zongyuan) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2000), 63-64.

school to that of Mozi, mostly seen as antagonistic to Confucius and thus not a popular topic of discussion among scholars, meant that the *Annals* was now fully marginalized within the intellectual discourse for the following centuries.[216]

In the 18th century, the connection Liu Zongyuan had drawn between Yan Ying and the Mohist school still shaped the discussions about the *Annals of Master Yan*. For some scholars, it seems to have become so naturalized that they could refer to it in order to make a completely different point. Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738-1801), for example, argued that the *Annals* constitute a case where the title of the work does not give away any intellectual affinity. Like many other works of the pre-imperial period, he claimed, the inclusion of a personal name in the title is purely an indication of which figure appears in the text. The story of this figure could have been retold by anyone, so the agreement between pre-imperial authors and readers went, according to Zhang Xuecheng:

> Mister Liu [Zongyuan] says that the *Annals of Master Yan* consists of the words of a Mohist. He does not consider Master Yan a Mohist, [rather he thinks] that a follower of Mohist learning recounts the events in which Master Yan took part and named the book accordingly, much like the chapter names "Master Gao" and "Wan Zhang" in the *Mengzi*.[217]
>
> 《晏子春秋》，柳氏以謂墨者之言。非以晏子為墨，為墨學者述晏子事，以名其書，猶《孟子》之《告子》、《萬章》名其篇也。

Zhang's argument challenged the fact that his contemporaries approached early texts by assuming a close connection between title and author. The example of the *Annals of Master Yan* is meant to convince the intended reader that Zhang's point is not that novel after all. Therefore, it can be assumed that he chose it because he considered it uncontroversial.

Yao Nai's separation of man and text

Considering the lack of scholarly engagement with the *Annals*, it seems likely that the association with Mozi had a negative impact on the status of that text and its author. Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1731-1815) argued that the good name of the *real* Yan Ying had been stained because of

[216] Milburn, *Annals of Master Yan*, 46-54.
[217] Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠, "Yan gong shang" 言公上 (Words Belong to Everyone, First Part), in Cang Xiuliang 仓修良 (ed.), *Wenshi tongyi xinbian xinzhu* 文史通义新编新注 (Comprehensive Theory of Writing and History Newly Compiled with New Commentary) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2005), 201.

the unreliable text bearing his name. Similar to Zhang Xuecheng, Yao argued that the *Annals of Master Yan* had little to do with Yan, and a lot with Mohism. Drawing on stories recorded in the *Zuo Tradition*, Yao indicated that Yan Ying was a morally upright person. He even claimed that when Confucius went to the state Qi 齊, where Yan Ying was active, it was Yan who had used his clout to lay the groundwork for this visit.

> When Confucius arrived in Qi, how could he, given the incompetence of Duke Jing, have come to be treated as [having a rank of the level] "between [the influential clans of] Ji and Meng" at once, when he was a ritual [*ru*] scholar from a neighboring [state]? This must have been due to the recommendation of Master Yan. That [the duke] was not able to employ Confucius must have been to the chagrin of Master Yan, who knew that his state was going to fall and could not be saved. So, how could there have been the affair of him blocking [the enfeoffment of] Confucius?[218]
>
> 當孔子至齊，以景公之庸懦，豈遽能以"季、孟之間"期以待鄰之一儒士哉？此必晏子薦之故也，及其不能用孔子，此必晏子所痛，而知其國之將亡不可救者，夫何有反沮孔子事哉？

Yao Nai alludes to an anecdote that was usually read as an illustration of the strained relation between Confucius and Yan Ying.[219] It relates how Confucius advises Duke Jing of Qi about matters of governing. Initially, he earns the ruler's approval. However, once the duke decides to enfeoff Confucius, Yan Ying intervenes. In a lengthy tirade, he argues that the teachings of Confucius are corrosive for public mores and require the waste of resources on pointless rituals. Afterwards, the duke's treatment of Confucius grows more distant, until he explains that he cannot treat him as someone of the same rank as the Ji clan, the most powerful family in Confucius's home state of Lu 魯. Instead, Confucius is to be treated as someone ranking lower than the Ji clan but still higher than the second-most influential family, the Meng clan. Thereupon, Confucius leaves the state of Qi.

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[218] Yao Nai, "Yanzi bu shou Beidian lun" 晏子不受邶殿論 (Discussion of Master Yan Not Receiving Beidian), in idem, *Xibaoxuan quanji* 惜抱軒全集 (Complete Collection of Yao Nai's Works) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991), 8.

[219] Two major elaborations exist: 1) "Hereditary House of Confucius" (*Kongzi shijia* 孔子世家), in *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 47.1644. 2) "Fei ru" 非儒 (Against Confucians), in Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Mozi jiangu* 墨子閒詁 (Exposing and Correcting the Mozi) (Taibei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1971), 189-190.

The most obvious interpretation of this anecdote is that Yan Ying maligned Confucius, which led to the duke's change of attitude. In order to uphold the image of a harmonious relation between the two men, Yao Nai doubts the authenticity of Yan's rebuttal of Confucius's teachings, and instead blames Confucius's decision to leave on the duke's inability to recognize worthy men. As the above quote makes clear, Yao Nai thinks that Confucius left because he expected to be treated better, even though he was merely a ritual scholar, not a high dignitary. Confucius could harbor such high expectations, Yao suggests, because Yan Ying, an influential political figure in Qi at that time, had recognized the talents of Confucius and had hoped for him to assist in saving the state.

The next challenge Yao Nai faces is to account for the anti-Confucian tirade, because if Yan Ying had such a high opinion of Confucius, he should not have opposed the latter's enfeoffment. Yao's strategy consists of doubting the authenticity of the tirade based on its textual provenance. Pointing out that the anecdote is first recorded in the *Mozi*, he insists that this is a deliberate misrepresentation, a point he makes by reiterating how Liu Zongyuan had characterized the *Annals*:

> Master Yan was famous for his frugality; after the Spring and Autumn Period, a follower of Mozi made use of stories about him to criticize Confucians. The affair of preventing the enfeoffment of Confucius was fabricated by a Mohist, thus it is recorded in the chapter "Against Confucianism" of the *Mozi*. Him saying that Confucians worship mourning and chase after grief, that they spend everything on lavish funerals, these are the shallow theories of the Mohists, not the words of the one who [donned] "mourning attire of the coarsest materials" to mourn [as if for] his own father and fully accorded with the rites.[220]
>
> 晏子以儉著，春秋之後，墨子之徒，假其說以難儒者。沮孔子封事，墨者造之也，故載於《墨子·非儒篇》。其言以儒者為崇喪遂哀，破產厚葬，此墨者之陋說，非"粗縗斬"以喪父盡禮者之言也。

In this passage, Yao Nai contrasts the information given about Yan Ying in two sources. According to the book *Mozi*, Yan was highly critical of the teachings of Confucius, while according to the *Zuo Tradition*, he mourned for his lord the way one usually mourns one's father. Yao Nai argues that everyone who dismisses Yan Ying as an enemy of Confucius does

[220] Ibid. The quote is from *Zuozhuan*, Xianggong 襄公 17.

so based on a less-than-credible source (the *Mozi*) and in complete disregard of another, canonical source (the *Zuo Tradition*). To further undermine the credibility of the story where Yan Ying speaks out against the enfeoffment of Confucius, Yao Nai argues that in the time when this is supposed to have taken place, the system of giving land to important servants of the state had not yet developed:

> That the feudal lords split up their territory to enfeoff their high ministers is a development of the period after the split of Jin into three states and after the Tian clan had taken over Qi. It is not a system of the time of Confucius when states gave no more than an estate or a town.[221]
>
> 諸侯裂地以封大夫，此三晉、田齊以後之事，非孔子時國不過賜田邑之制也。

Jin was split into three successor states over the course of the mid-5th century BCE, and the Tian-clan took power in Qi in the early 4th century BCE; thus, both allusions point to a time when Confucius had been dead for more than half a century. This makes it unlikely for Yao Nai that a ruler would have offered Confucius a fief. His textual operations only leave two parts of the passage in the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) intact: Yao does not question that Confucius discussed governing with Duke Jing, or that he left the state disgruntled. However, Yao considers this to be the result of the duke's lack of far-sightedness. The part of the story that put the blame on Yan Ying and thus harmed his reputation is anachronistic, Yao claims, and should not be given credence.

Throughout this essay, Yao Nai avoids directly engaging the *Annals of Master Yan*. The way he approaches the problems suggests that he wanted to draw a strict line between the historical Yan Ying, who is described in some passages of the *Zuo Tradition*, and the use to which this figure has been put in later literature. Specifically, Yao insists that in the *Records of the Historian* and the *Mozi*, the image of Yan Ying had been heavily distorted through contamination by Mohist concerns. By showing that both sources are not reliable, Yao Nai clears the name of Yan Ying by dissociating him from the Mohist tradition and establishes a connection to Confucius by claiming that Yan Ying had something to do with Confucius's visit to Qi.

Developing Liu Zongyuan's proposals about the disconnection between Yan Ying and the *Annals of Master Yan* further, Yao Nai pushes the issue in a direction that is characteristic for

[221] Ibid.

the 18th century. He considers Yan's character in need of defense and digs through the historical record to unearth evidence of actions that fully accord with ritual demands and show unfaltering loyalty in the face of the state's decline. According to Yao Nai, Yan Ying is an unambiguously virtuous person who, despite anecdotes that state the opposite, recognized the benefits of having Confucius close to the center of power. Beneath the Mohist surface, residues of the authentic and valuable insights of this statesman are still identifiable if one looks in the right places.

Sun Xingyan's portrayal of Yan Ying as a good Confucian

One of the more prolific students of "master texts" (*zi shu* 子書) in the 18th century was Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753-1818), who edited and reprinted many such works. In his "Preface to the *Annals of Master Yan*" (*Yanzi chunqiu xu* 晏子春秋序), dated 1788, Sun goes one step further than Yao Nai by arguing that the value not only of Yan Ying himself, but also of this text should be reconsidered. He makes the point that the *Annals* in its extant form is not a forgery, but the authentic old text, put together by followers and retainers of Yan Ying, edited by Liu Xiang and formerly categorized as a Confucian work. Undermining the connection to Mohism, Sun emphasizes that despite some philosophical differences, Yan Ying and the work bearing his name fit into the Confucian school.

While explaining why this work is called "annals," Sun lays out his theory of circumstances of the textual formation:

> When Ying died, his retainers mourned him, picked out [stories about] his behavior from state chronicles and turned them into a text. Even though it does not contain years and months, they kept the old name. Minister Yu [mid-3rd century BCE] and Lu Jia [ca. 240-170 BCE] also employed such an appellation. The text *Master Yan* was produced in the Warring States period; in general, works named after a master are not written by these men, there is nothing astonishing about this.[222]
>
> 嬰死，其賓客哀之，從國史刺取其行事，成書，雖無年月，尚仍舊名。虞卿、陸賈等襲其號。《晏子》書成在戰國之世，凡稱子書，多非自著，無足怪者。

[222] Sun Xingyan, "Yanzi chunqiu xu" 晏子春秋序 (Preface to the *Annals of Master Yan*), in Wang Yunwu 王云五 (ed.), *Sun Yuanru xiansheng quanji* 孫淵如先生全集 (Complete Collection of Mister Sun Xingyan) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 76.

The issue at stake is that usually, "annals" is used in the titles of state chronicles that record important events in a strictly chronological fashion and meticulously keep track of time by noting the progress of the seasons. The *Annals of Master Yan*, a collection of anecdotes, is not organized in a comparable manner. According to Sun Xingyan, the inclusion of the word "annals" in the title is because all stories contained in the work were drawn from such state chronicles by the retainers of Yan Ying. These retainers were thus responsible for this work, not some followers of Mozi.

While not written by Yan Ying himself, Sun portrays the *Annals* as a text put together by people who personally knew him. With Mohism out of the picture, another possible threat Sun perceives is that the extant *Annals* is considered a forgery. He argues against such doubts by devoting lengthy passages of his preface to a comparison of differences between the *Annals* and other early texts, such as similar anecdotes told with different protagonists or character variants. The high amount of such differences suggests to Sun Xingyan that the stories were adapted from hearsay and that the text has a long history of transmission, both of which point to an early date of production. Were it a forged text, Sun insists, the forger would have simply copied verbatim from other sources and such differences would not exist. Sun goes so far as to say that compared to many other works from the late pre-imperial and early imperial period (roughly the 3rd and 2nd century BCE), the style of the *Annals* is of the most ancient quality.[223]

Joining the age-old debate whether Master Yan is closer to Confucius or to Mozi, Sun Xinyan harshly criticizes Liu Zongyuan for his theory that there is a connection between Yan Ying and Mohism. Sun does not deny that there are differences between the teachings of Yan Ying and Confucius. He considers these differences less significant than the commonalities, however. Sun makes ample use of quotations from Confucian texts that display a welcoming attitude towards Yan Ying and show that this school is inclusive enough to tolerate internal conflict:

> Master Yan preferred frugal rites, that is what is referred to as "when the state is wasteful [with its resources], he shows an example of frugality." His exhausting the rites in mourning [his father] Yan Huanzi is also different from Mozi's model of short mourning periods. The *Kong Family Masters' Anthology* says: "Examining the records, [one finds that] what Master Yan has done is no different from the Confucians." The way of the Confucians is extremely broad, Confucius says of the behavior of a Confucian that "his errors and failings can be gently pointed out to him, but they should not be enumerated

[223] 文最古質 Ibid.

to his face." Thus Gongbo Liao spoke ill of Zilu, and yet he is equally included in the school of the sage.[224]

晏子尚儉禮，所謂"國奢，則示之以儉。"其居晏桓子之喪盡禮，亦與墨子短喪之法異。《孔叢》云："察傳記，晏子之所行，未有以異於儒焉。"儒之道甚大，孔子言儒行有"過失可微辨而不可面數。"故公伯寮愬子路，而同列聖門。

Liu Zongyuan had pointed out that the Mohists and Yan Ying shared a preference for frugality. Sun rebukes him by quoting the defense of Yan Ying brought forward by Zengzi 曾子, a disciple of Confucius, in the chapter "Tan Gong" 檀弓 of the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記). According to Zengzi's reasoning, Yan Ying's restrained approach to ritual matters was an indirect criticism of the extravagance of the ruling house, not a disregard of propriety. Yan Ying would have followed the prescriptions had the state been run differently. His approach to ritual was not a sign of neglect, but an expression of Yan's unwavering loyalty to the state which he served.

After this explicit endorsement of Yan Ying by a direct disciple of Confucius and another one from a text purporting to be by a member of the Kong clan, a quote from the *Record of Rites* and a final allusion to the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) are meant to show that there had always been disagreements within the school of Confucius. Sun thereby implies that a critical opinion does not make one an enemy of Confucius and reduces the dissent to an intra-factional one.

In opposition to Liu Zongyuan's suggestion to categorize the *Annals of Master Yan* as a Mohist text, Sun subscribes to the view that Yan Ying was a respectable statesman whose differences with Confucius are so minor that they do not preclude his inclusion in the latter's school. In an attempt at complete rehabilitation, Sun Xingyan argues that the status of the historical Yan Ying should be recognized, and furthermore that the text ascribed to him is both valuable and as close to being authentic as works from this period can possibly be.

There was, however, opposition to such positive reassessments of Yan Ying and the *Annals*. Hong Liangji 洪亮吉 (1746-1809) personally faulted Sun Xingyan for the flimsy grounds on which the latter's defense rested:

[224] Ibid. Both Gongbo Liao and Zilu are disciples of Confucius.

> Recently, my friend Mister Sun Xingyan collated and printed the *Yanzi* and completely disagreed with [Liu] Zongyuan's theory, saying that Master Yan was loyal to his lord and loved the state, and should thus naturally be included in the Confucian school. But considering that Mister Mo got callous feet from saving Song [because he had to hurry to change the aggressor's mind in time], is he not loyal to his lord and loves his state? If we have to rely on this to distinguish Confucians from Mohists, it is a biased view.[225]
>
> 近吾友孫君星衍校刊《晏子》，深以宗元之說為非，謂晏子忠君愛國，自當入之儒家。然試思墨氏重趼救宋，獨非忠君愛國者乎？若必據此以為儒墨之分，則又一偏之見也。

As mentioned above, one of the positive aspects about Yan Ying that Sun had highlighted was his loyalty. As Hong Liangji shows by alluding to a well-known story, Mozi was no less dedicated a servant of the state: Upon hearing that Chu 楚 was about to attack Song 宋, Mozi, who had once held high office in Song, travelled for ten days and ten nights straight in order to persuade those who planned the attack to let it be.[226] The question, Hong insists, is not whether Mozi or Yan Ying were virtuous persons. Hong emphasizes the ideological issues that separate these schools of thought, and he drives home this point by quoting from the harsh tirade against Confucius's teachings ascribed to Yan in the *Records of the Historian*. Yan Ying and Confucius may both have been loyal advisers to their respective rulers, but this does not mean that there existed any significant overlap between their views. For Hong Liangji, claims of such an overlap are transparent attempts to bring heretic ideas back into circulation.

Relation of the Annals-*case to the debate about master's texts*

The case of the *Annals of Master Yan* described above is best understood as one facet of a larger trend of the time: During the 18th century, scholars began to seriously and favorably engage with texts that had previously been condemned as records of questionable values. The *Mozi* and the *Xunzi* are two high-profile cases that were affected by this re-evaluation, and they indicate a turn away from a Mencian conception of Confucianism. The *Mengzi* harshly criticizes the

[225] Hong Liangji 洪亮吉, "Xin kan Yanzi chunqiu shu hou" 新刊晏子春秋書後 (Written after Reading the Newly Printed *Annals of Master Yan*), in idem, *Juanshi ge wen jia ji* 卷施閣文甲集 (First Prose Collection from the Pavilion of the *juanshi* Flower), in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Complete Essentials of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), vol. 132, 10.13b.
[226] „Gong Shu" 公輸 (Gong Shu), in Sun Yirang, *Mozi jiangu*, 303-304.

ideas recorded in the *Mozi*, and the *Xunzi*, with its claim that human nature is bad, positions itself in direct opposition to the *Mengzi*.[227]

Through its connection to Mohism, the *Annals of Master Yan* shared the fate of the *Mozi*. As efforts at re-evaluation of the latter work had only just begun in the 18th century, with scholars such as Wang Zhong 汪中 (1745-1794) and Sun Xingyan, the only option left to defenders of Yan Ying was to dissociate him from Mohism.[228] It is telling, however, that the scholars who wanted to bring about a more positive assessment of Yan Ying did not stop at dissociating him from Mohism; they usually went out of their way to emphasize his proximity to Confucius. Sun Xingyan applied this strategy to defend not only the value of the *Annals*, but also of the *Mozi*. As mentioned above, Sun quoted texts from the Confucian tradition that explicitly endorsed Yan Ying and argued for an inclusive conception of the term "Confucian," as a home to many differing voices. He went one step further for Mozi, whom he introduced as a renegade disciple of the Confucian school that came to dismiss the rituals he had been taught as tedious and wasteful.[229] Despite these disagreements, Sun identified a substantial overlap between the teachings of Confucius and those of Mozi, for example in their shared support for "moderating expenses" (*jie yong* 節用).[230] Sun reduced the difference between Confucius and Mozi to one between the rites of the Zhou 周-dynasty and the rites of the Xia 夏-dynasty while he glossed over the numerous passages of the *Mozi* that criticize Confucian teachings.

These very early stages of the revival of the "master texts" constitute a revival under the aegis of Confucius. Scholars who claimed a higher status for neglected works had the tendency to do so by highlighting the biographical and ideological proximity of the authors to Confucius. They did not assign these masters an independent space within the spectrum of early intellectual lineages, and these masters were acceptable only insofar as they were in basic agreement with Confucian teachings. More often than not, such basic agreement was underwritten by anecdotes that highlight the personal amity between Confucius and another master. For Chinese philologists of the 18th century, biography and intellectual position went hand in hand.

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[227] Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology. Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984), 76-78.
[228] For a general overview of the status of the *Mozi* in imperial China, see Carine Defoort, "The Modern Formation of Early Mohism: Sun Yirang's *Exposing and Correcting the Mozi*," in *T'oung Pao*, vol. 101, n. 1-3, 2015, 221-236.
[229] Based on a passage in "Yao lüe" 要略 (Outline of Essentials), in Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣, *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 淮南子校釋 (Huainanzi Collated and Explained) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997), vol. 2, 2150.
[230] Sun Xingyan, "Mozi houxu" 墨子後序 (Postface to the *Mozi*), in Wang Yunwu (ed.), *Sun Yuanru xiansheng quanji*, 77.

In Yao Nai's defense of Yan Ying, one finds the most revealing application of this principle. Characteristically for the author-centered approach to interpretation, Yao all but constructed a biographical episode around the theoretical overlap between Confucius and Yan Ying. From the story of Confucius's visit to Qi, the tiniest of all clues with Qi being the state where Yan was active, he deduced that the latter had had something to do with this visit. This is not Yao committing a "biographical fallacy," as that would mean that he transposed an existing literary trope into a factual biography. There was no trope of Yan Ying inviting Confucius to Qi, only dots that could be connected to yield such an image given that one assumed, contrary to many well-known sources, that Yan Ying saw a kindred spirit in Confucius.

By making Yan Ying palpable to their contemporaries in this way, scholars like Yao Nai and Sun Xingyan in effect proposed a different reading of the *Annals of Master Yan*: Instead of considering the text a record of a critic of Confucius's teachings, they highlighted the possible consonances. Since neither of them engaged with the *Annals* in any depth, however, the exact direction they wanted the interpretation to take cannot be substantiated. After all, the *Annals* remained a marginal work. If Sun Xingyan's approach to the *Mozi* is any indication, it is likely that conceptual overlap with text from the Confucian tradition could have served as the basis for a more charitable reading of the *Annals*. As the rebuttal by Hong Liangji shows, however, such attempts at reassessment met with determined resistance.[231]

Getting the classic right with Mister Zuo

According to the traditional account, first recorded in the *Mengzi*, Confucius created the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) as an indirect way to reprimand the ruling class of his time for their reckless behavior.[232] On the surface, this text is nothing but a chronicle of the state of Lu, sparse in detail and written in the most laconic way imaginable. In order to retrieve the messages that Confucius had hidden between the lines, scholars from at least the Han 漢 dynasty (202 BCE - 9 CE) onwards relied on auxiliary works that spelled out the events in much greater detail, which allowed them to fathom how the choice of words indicated moral judgment. Such works were referred to as "traditions" (*zhuan* 傳). Throughout most of the history of imperial China, the

[231] The resistance against a positive evaluation of the *Mozi* was even stronger and more emotional, cf. Defoort, "The Modern Formation of Early Mohism," 231-232.

[232] Mengzi 孟子,"Tengweng gong xia" 滕文公下 (Duke Tengweng, Part 2), in Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Collected Commentaries to the Chapters and Verses of the Four Books) (Taibei: Changan chubanshe, 1991), 273.

Zuo Tradition was held in highest regard and eclipsed its two other surviving competitors, the *Gongyang* 公羊 and the *Guliang* 穀梁 *Tradition*.

As Zuo, Gongyang, and Guliang are all family names, the connection between the people behind these names and Confucius became an issue whenever the reliability of their exegesis was at stake. Since at least Han times, Mister Zuo 左氏 (*shi*) was identified as Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, a person that Confucius mentions in the *Analects*:

> The Master said, "Adulating words, an insinuating appearance, and excessive respect - Zuo Qiuming was ashamed of them. I also am ashamed of them. To conceal resentment against a person, and appear friendly with him - Zuo Qiuming was ashamed of such conduct. I also am ashamed of it."[233]
>
> 子曰："巧言、令色、足恭，左丘明恥之，丘亦恥之。匿怨而友其人，左丘明恥之，丘亦恥之。"

Based on this flimsy account, Zuo Qiuming, about whom not much else is known, was turned into the author of the *Zuo Tradition*, and furnished with credentials. According to the *Records of the Historian*, Zuo Qiuming was afraid that the disciples of Confucius would start to interpret the *Annals* based on their own ideas and neglect what their teacher had told them, so he set out to compose the *Zuo Tradition*.[234] About two centuries later, the *Book of the [Former] Han* expanded his role, claiming that Confucius "read the scribal records [of the state of Lu] together with Zuo Qiuming."[235] According to this version of the story, Zuo Qiuming not only heard the teachings that the other disciples had heard, but was also present when Confucius prepared the project by digging into the sources. This is as close to the intention of Confucius as anyone could possible get, which is a strong argument in support of the authority of the *Zuo Tradition*.

The status of the Zuo Tradition *in the Qing*

The *Annals* in conjunction with the *Zuo Tradition* dominated the intellectual world in the late 18th and early 19th century. Towards the end of his life, the eminent scholar Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735-1815) produced a wide array of writings about the *Annals* that reflect the continuing

[233] *Analects*, 5.25. Translation by Legge, modified.
[234] "Shi'er zhuhou nianbiao" 十二諸侯年表 (Yearly Tables of the Twelve Lords), in *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 14.509-510.
[235] 與左丘明觀其史記 "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 (Treatise on Literature), in *Hanshu* 漢書 (*Book of the [Former] Han*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 30.1715.

interest in every detail of that work. Besides essays on questions such as why the season of winter was not explicitly recorded in one year[236] or how certain characters were to be understood, Duan especially focused on the difference between the verbs "to kill" (*sha* 殺) and "to commit regicide" (*shi* 弑), a distinction that he thought had been blurred over time as wrong characters crept in. He dedicated four essays to the task of clearing up the misunderstanding he saw arising from such carelessness.[237] The hunt for the subtle praise and blame encoded in the *Annals* was still on, as it made all the difference to Qing scholars whether Confucius had considered the violent dethronement of a ruler justified or not.

Even though Duan relied on all three commentarial traditions to arrive at his understanding of the classic, he reserved the highest praise for the *Zuo Tradition* and wrote two prefaces for new publications dealing with that work. In both of them, he diagnosed the respective author with a case of "*Zuo*-obsession" (*Zuo pi* 左癖),[238] described by Duan as the insatiable desire to collect each and every source pertaining to this text.[239] One of these authors, Zhang Congxian 張聰咸 (1783-1814), seems to have made a name for himself in that regard, as a poem by Hu Chenggong 胡承珙 (1776-1832) says of Zhang that he was "alone afflicted by an incurable disease, developing a *Zuo*-obsession."[240] Members of the scholarly community cultivated a jocular terminology to refer to the most dedicated researchers of the *Zuo Tradition*, which indicates its importance during the Qing.[241]

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[236] Even if nothing worthy of being chronicled happened, the *Annals* still kept track of time by simply listing the month and the season as an entry.

[237] Chapter (*juan* 卷) 4 of Duan Yucai's *Jingyun lou ji* 經韻樓集 (Collection from the Mansion of Classics and Rhymes) contains the following four essays on the difference between "to kill" and "to commit regicide:" "Chunqiu jing sha shi er zi bianbie kao" 春秋經殺弑二字辨別考 (Study on the Difference between the Two Characters "to kill" and "to commit regicide" in the Classic of the *Annals*); "Jin Like shi qi jun zhi zi Xiqi" 晉里克弑其君之子奚齊 (Like of Jin Committed Regicide against Xiqi, the Son of his Ruler); "Jun mu sha jun dang shu shi lun" 君母殺君當書弑論 (Discussing that the Mother of the Ruler Killed the Ruler Should be Recorded as "Committed Regicide"); and "Gongyang jingzhuan shi zi bian wu" 公羊經傳弑字辯誤 (Identifying Errors Concerning the Character "To Commit Regicide" in the Classic and Commentary of Gongyang).

[238] This specific type goes back to the *Jinshu*-biography of Du Yu 杜預 (222-285), an influential specialist on the *Zuo Tradition*. "Obsession" in general played an important role in the culture of the late Ming, cf. Judith Zeitlin, "The Petrified Heart: Obsession in Chinese Literature, Art and Medicine," in *Late Imperial China*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1991, 1-26.

[239] Duan Yucai, "Zuozhuan kan Du xu" 左傳刊杜序 (Preface to the *Zuo Tradition* in the version of Du [Yu]), in Zhao Hang 趙航 and Xue Zhengxing 薛正興 (eds.), *Jingyun lou ji* 經韻樓集 (Collection from the Mansion of Classics and Rhymes) (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 70.

[240] 獨抱膏肓成左癖 Hu Chenggong 胡承珙, "Zeng Zhang Ruanlin (Congxian) xiaolian" 贈張阮林（聰咸）孝廉 (To the Recommended scholar Zhang Ruanlin [Congxian]), in idem, *Qiushi tang shiji* 求是堂詩集 (Poetry Collection from the Hall of Seeking What Is Correct), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1500, 225/13.5b.

[241] Usage of "Zuo obsession" peaked during the Qing, according to a full-text database search.

In contexts closer to the political center of power, the *Zuo Tradition* was also lauded as the *sine qua non* of scholarship on the *Annals*. Qi Zhaonan 齊召南 (1703-1768), a scholar of the prestigious Hanlin Academy, wrote the postface on the *Zuo Tradition* for the *Complete Library of the Four Categories* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書), the imperially commissioned anthology. Later, this postface was also included in the *Sequel to the Outstanding Writings of the August Qing* (*Huang Qing wenying xubian* 皇清文穎續編), the digest of the massive *Complete Library* meant for imperial perusal. Praising the abundance of details contained in the *Zuo Tradition* concerning the rise and fall of states and the development of inter-state relations between the poles of war and peace, Qi Zhaonan asks rhetorically how one was to make sense of the *Annals* without them.[242] In the elite world of scholars, either in close proximity to power or in less formal contexts, the *Zuo Tradition* retained its primacy among the exegetical traditions of the *Annals*. Or, as Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804) confidently put it, "the superiority of Mister Zuo compared to Gongyang is appropriately recognized by everyone."[243]

In keeping with their tendency to read texts through their authors, Qing scholars attempted to pin down where "Mister Zuo" had his knowledge from. Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛 (1722-1798), whose sister was married to Qian Daxin, presented a prototypical translation of this veneration of the *Zuo Tradition* into the realm of authorial biography:

> Mister Zuo personally received [instruction in] the classic from the sage. Gongyang and Guliang were both disciples of Zixia, making them only twice removed in the transmission, their judgments should also not be far off; yet there are still differences. When the Confucians of late Zhou, Qin and Han times received [instruction in] the classics, they all held on to the teachings of their teachers and called themselves a specialized school or famous lineage; there is nothing astonishing about this.[244]

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[242] Qi Zhaonan 齊召南, "Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhushu kaozheng houxu" 春秋左傳注疏考證後序 (Postface to the Evidential Analysis of the Commentary and Subcommentary of the *Zuo Tradition* of the *Annals*), in *Huang Qing Wenying xubian* 皇清文穎續編 (Sequel to the Outstanding Writings of the August Qing), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1664, 650/6.24a-b. Qi Zhaonan admits that this work's explanations of the classic are rather general and says that the creator of the *Tradition* had personally seen the records (as opposed to having learned directly from Confucius), yet it seems that the level of detail merits this high praise nonetheless.

[243] 夫《左氏》之勝《公羊》，宜乎夫人而知。 Qian Daxin, "Da wen si" 答問四 (Answering Questions, Section Four) in *Qianyan tang ji* 潛研堂集 (Collection from the Hall of Focused Research), in Chen Wenhe 陳文和 (ed.), *Jiading Qian Daxin quanji* 嘉定錢大昕全集 (Complete Collection of Qian Daxin from Jiading) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), vol. 9, 84.

[244] Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛, "San zhuan hu yi" 三傳互異 (Differences between the Three Traditions), in idem, *Yi shu bian* 蛾術編 (Compilation of Scholarship Accumulated in an Ant-Like Fashion) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958), 116.

> 左氏親受經于聖人。公羊、穀梁皆子夏弟子，相去不過再傳，其是非宜不大謬，然猶有彼此互異者。蓋晚周、秦、漢諸儒受經，各守師說，號為專門名家，無足怪也。

In Wang's opinion, which many of his contemporaries shared, the earlier a source, the more trustworthy it is, as knowledge gets lost in transmission. In keeping with the Han-dynasty portrait of the figure, Wang stressed that Zuo Qiuming had learned about the meaning of the *Annals* directly from Confucius. The competing exegetical traditions, however, were founded by men who were merely disciples of Zixia, himself a disciple of Confucius. Consequently, they only had indirect access to knowledge about this work. This explains why the latter two traditions were not always entirely correct in their interpretations. Mister Gongyang and Mister Guliang were part of the Confucian school (read: the *Gongyang* and *Guliang Tradition* are generally reliable), but not disciples of Confucius himself (read: the texts ascribed to them also contain misleading information). Furthermore, such variant interpretations persisted throughout time because disciples tended to defend the teachings of their master and had no incentive to correct them based on what other masters taught. In the essay from which this quotation is taken, Wang Mingsheng consequently goes on to show how the explanations provided in the *Zuo Tradition* in two cases are correct, while the other two works are wrong.

The genealogy which portrays the authors of the *Gongyang*- and the *Guliang*-commentaries as disciples of Zixia was not an innovation by Wang Mingsheng. In the Tang 唐 dynasty (618-906), Yang Shixun 楊士勛 (active ca. mid-7th-century) wrote a subcommentary for the *Guliang Tradition* in which he made the same claim.[245] Another Tang scholar, Xu Yan 徐彥 (active ca. late 8th- to early 9th century) said as much about the author of the *Gongyang Tradition* in his own subcommentary and quoted a lost source to that effect from the Later Han dynasty (25-220).[246] It seems likely that the line connecting "Master Gongyang" and "Master Guliang" to Zixia had already been established long before Tang scholars drew increased attention to this fact.

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[245] See Yang Shixun's subcommentary to Fan Ning's 范甯 (339-401) "Chunqiu Guliang zhuan xu" 春秋穀梁傳序 (Preface to the *Guliang Tradition* of the *Annals*), in Li Xueqin 李學勤 et. al. (eds.), *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben* 十三經注疏整理本 (Collated Version of the Thirteen Classics with Commentary and Subcommentary) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol. 22, 3a-b.

[246] See Xu Yan's subcommentary to He Xiu's 何休 (129-182) preface to the *Gongyang Tradition*, "Han sikong yuan Rencheng Fan He Xiu xu" 漢司空掾任城樊何休序 (Preface by the Clerk to the Han Minister of Public Works, He Xiu from Fan in Rencheng), in Li Xueqin et. al. (eds.), *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben*, vol. 20, 4a. Xu Yan quotes Dai Hong 戴宏 (2nd century CE).

By repeating such claims, established as they may be, Wang Mingsheng affirmed them. He went further, however, when he explicitly connected them to his deliberations on the value of the different exegetical traditions: Wang identified Zixia, the additional chain in the transmission history, as a possible source of distortion and prioritized the *Zuo Tradition* with its unsurpassably close ties to Confucius himself. The raw material may have been there already, but Wang Mingsheng used it to justify the exalted position of the *Zuo Tradition*.

This is the background for how scholars of the Qing engaged with the exegetical traditions of the *Annals*. In keeping with their author-centered approach, they expressed their views on the value of the *Zuo Tradition* by supporting or questioning the lore surrounding Zuo Qiuming. As the renewed interest in the *Gongyang*- and *Guliang*-exegesis only began to enter the mainstream in the 19th century,[247] the scholars of the late 18th century still lived in an intellectual environment where the primacy of the *Zuo Tradition* was generally not questioned. Consequently, defenders of the *Zuo Tradition* did not go to great lengths to make their case, and critics made comparatively cautious claims. What is instructive about this debate, lacking in mass appeal and wide-ranging consequences, is how closely a scholar's appreciation of the *Zuo Tradition* correlates with the proximity he establishes between Zuo Qiuming and Confucius.

Doubts about the identity of Mister Zuo

A small number of Qing scholar questioned the close connection that early sources and contemporary scholars alike established between Confucius and the author of the *Zuo Tradition*. Cui Shu 崔述 (1740-1818) reminded his readers that some had posited that Mister Zuo was a man of the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-206 BCE), living more than two and a half centuries after Confucius. Navigating between this and the other extreme of accepting Mister Zuo as a contemporary of Confucius, Cui was convinced of two things: While Mister Zuo was not the Zuoqiu Ming (as he read the name) of the *Analects*, he was still close in time to Confucius:

> My remark: The *Zuo Tradition* ends with the death of Zhibo [in 453 BCE], and uses the posthumous name "Duke Dao" [of Lu, d. 437 BCE], [both events of] several decades after the death of Confucius; it also sometimes displays what is called a writing style that is different from the intention of the classic. That it was certainly not [written by]

[247] Benjamin Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship. The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), esp. 171-174.

someone who learned directly from Confucius is crystal clear, [so] one should not equate [this person] with the Zuoqiu Ming of the *Analects*.[248]

余按：《左傳》終於智伯之亡，係以悼公之謚，上詎孔子之卒已數十年，而所稱書法不合經意者亦往往有之，必非親炙於孔子者明甚，不得以《論語》之左丘明當之也。

Based on events recorded and posthumous names used in the *Zuo Tradition*, Cui Shu points out that several decades separate Confucius from the author of this work. Furthermore, it is not entirely faithful to the intention of the *Annals*, the text it is supposed to interpret. Therefore, Cui considers the lore that links the *Zuo Tradition* with Zuoqiu Ming/Zuo Qiuming and Confucius untenable. However, sticking to one of his perennial concerns, Cui Shu points out that the language of the *Zuo Tradition* is direct and terse, a feature it shares with other early texts like the *Analects* and certain chapters of the *Record of Rites*.[249] This makes a later date of writing unlikely.

Due to the lack of sources, Cui Shu has to leave his readers in the dark about the identity of this "Mister Zuo." While he is certain that "Mister Zuo" is not the same person as "Mister Zuoqiu" from the *Analects*, he lived not long after Confucius and he may or may not have been called Zuo Qiuming. Since the *Zuo Tradition* is *the* crucial source for the history of the Spring and Autumn Period, however, Cui is unable to leave the work dangling in the void without an author-ascription:

Yet without this exegetical tradition, the remnants of the system of the Three Dynasties, the events of the time of the Eastern Zhou [dynasty] as well as the dates and sequence of the affairs of the sages and worthies cannot be studied; this text is indeed [by] an accomplished supporter of the cause from the time after Confucius, so this person cannot but be identified.[250]

然無此傳則三代之遺制，東周之時事，與聖賢之事跡年月先後，皆無可考，則此書實孔子以後一大功臣也，不可不標其人。

[248] Cui Shu 崔述, "Zhu-Si kaoxin yulu juan zhi san" 洙泗考信餘錄卷之三 (Additional Record of Seeking What Is Trustworthy in [the History of] Confucius, Third Chapter), in Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (ed.), *Cui Dongbi yishu* 崔東壁遺書 (Works Bequeathed by Cui Shu) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1983), 394b.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid, 395a.

This passage contains one of the most explicit acknowledgments of the importance of the author-text-nexus for scholars of the Qing dynasty: The *Zuo Tradition* is a valuable text, yet Cui Shu finds the commonly given author ascription unsustainable. At the same time, the text cannot function within the discourse without an author. Cui's minimalist solution for this dilemma is to accept the "Mister Zuo" 左氏 from the transmitted full title of the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuo shi zhuan* 左氏傳) and turn it into the cypher "Master Zuo" 左子. By discussing this figure right after the first-generation disciples of Confucius and before Confucius's grandson Zisi 子思, Cui Shu makes clear where he thinks "Master Zuo" belongs. Everything else about him remains shrouded in mystery, but at least now, furnished with credentials as a supporter of Confucius, he can take over the role of the author and anchor the *Zuo Tradition* within early intellectual history.

While Cui Shu only had his doubts about "Mister Zuo" but still defended the value of the *Zuo Tradition*, a few of his contemporaries traced the flaws in this text back to the missing biographical connection of its author to Confucius. In his characteristically careful manner, in the essay "The Three Traditions to the *Annals* all Originate from Zengzi" (*Chunqiu san zhuan jie chu yu Zengzi* 春秋三傳皆出於曾子), Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (1717-1796) did little more than quoting lengthy excerpts from a preface by the Yuan 元 dynasty (1279-1368) scholar Hao Jing 郝經 (1223-1275). In the preface in question, Hao Jing developed a rather novel theory about the early transmission of the three exegetical traditions to the *Annals*. Hao claimed that all of them were transmitted through Zengzi. Basing himself on earlier records that listed Zuo Qiuming as the first transmitter, Hao Jing argued that the name "Zengzi" was missing above "Zuo Qiuming." In his view, in keeping with the lessons about frictions between fathers and sons in the *Annals*, Zengzi did not want to transmit his teachings directly to his son, so he passed them on to him through Zuo Qiuming. Counting the number of times followers of Confucius were mentioned in the three traditions, Hao further presented his theory that a certain "Luzi" 魯子 mentioned frequently was actually a miswriting of Zengzi 曾子, as the characters were graphically similar and no record of a "Luzi" was anywhere to be found. Based on these findings, Hao Jing constructs an elaborate genealogy for the early transmission of the teachings of the *Annals* that is centered on Zengzi.

This theory, it seems, did not convince too many people, and while Lu Wenchao did endorse it, we should not read too much into it. First, this "essay" consists almost exclusively of excerpts from Hao Jing's text, with but one sentence of endorsement added by Lu. Second, it is part of

a collection of writings that was published only in 1838, four decades after Lu had passed away.[251] By no means is this a central contribution to the debate about the interpretation of the *Annals*. Still, it is enlightening that Hao Jing's theory caught the eye of Lu and that the latter neither ignored nor refuted it, but praised it as "very reliable" (*po ke ju yi* 頗可據依) instead.[252] Though there seem to be no strong statements by Lu Wenchao about his view of the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* traditions, as a collator he frequently made use of both works, which indicates that at the very least, he valued them as sources for variant readings. Read in comparison to the contemporary debate, Lu's endorsement of Hao Jing's theory that all exegetical traditions go back to the same person is an indirect refutation of the primacy usually granted to the *Zuo Tradition*. If we understand Lu's essay in this way, then he challenges the primacy of Zuo Qiuming and his work quite literally by inserting someone else in the line of transmission before him: Zuo Qiuming, too, did not have direct access to Confucius, thus his interpretation is no better than those of his two competitors are.

In contrast to Lu Wenchao, Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1814) was very outspoken about his doubts concerning the reliability of the *Zuo Tradition*. He discusses the value of this text in several essays contained in his *Various Studies Written While Caring for My Parents* (*Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考). One of them is aptly titled "The Names in the Narratives of the *Zuo Tradition* are Disorderly and Messy" (*Zuozhuan xushi shiming cuoza* 《左傳》敘事氏名錯雜). In that essay, Zhao Yi complains that there is no apparent system to the use of different names such as personal names (*ming* 名), styles (*zi* 字) and posthumous names (*shihao* 諡號). Since they are used as if interchangeable, it becomes very challenging to follow the development of a story. Much more importantly, however, Zhao asks how one is to deduce the proverbial praise and blame encoded in the *Annals* if the names are not correct.[253]

Based on his critical opinion on the *Zuo Tradition*, Zhao Yi conceives of Zuo Qiuming as having worked separately from Confucius. He explains that there were two kinds of

[251] See the preface to the *Notes from Reading the Histories* (*Du shi zhaji* 讀史札記) by Lao Ge 勞格 (1820-1864), in Lu Wenchao 盧文弨, *Zhongshan zhaji, Longcheng zhaji, Du shi zhaji* 鍾山札記、龍城札記、讀史札記 (Zhongshan Reading Notes, Longcheng Reading Notes, Notes from Reading the Histories) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 161.

[252] Lu Wenchao, "Chunqiu san zhuan jie chu yu Zengzi" 春秋三傳皆出於曾子 (The Three Traditions to the *Annals* all Originate from Zengzi), in idem, *Zhongshan zhaji, Longcheng zhaji, Du shi zhaji*, 168.

[253] Zhao Yi 趙翼, "Zuozhuan xushi shiming cuoza" 《左傳》敘事氏名錯雜 (The Names in the Narratives of the *Zuo Tradition* Are Disorderly and Messy), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 (Various Studies Written While Caring for my Parents) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1990), 36-37. Zhao refrains from using the phrase "correcting names" (*zheng ming* 正名).

governmental records in the time of Confucius, one for important matters of the state, and one for lesser events. Quoting the early commentator Du Yu 杜預 (222-285), Zhao says that Confucius only based himself on the record of important events in writing the *Annals*. When penning the *Zuo Tradition*, Zuo Qiuming also made use of all the other records:

> Yet even though the sage did not document it in the classic, the records still existed, thus Mister Zuo was able to use them as a basis to deduce the intention of the sage's not documenting them.[254]
>
> 然夫子雖不書於經，而記載自在，故左氏得據以推聖人不書之本意。

According to Zhao Yi, Zuo Qiuming culled his knowledge from historical records, by which Zhao implied that Zuo Qiuming did not get it directly from Confucius. The choice of words with which Zhao Yi describes the act of Zuo interpreting the *Annals* supports this reading: He had to "deduce" (*tui* 推) what Confucius had in mind when he did not document certain events. While access to the original records may have given Zuo an advantageous position to do so, this version of the story still introduces an element of uncertainty. Furthermore, this portrayal allows Zhao Yi to explain another curious feature of the *Zuo Tradition*, namely that in some years, it does not comment on the events of the *Annals* at all but talks about seemingly unrelated events:[255]

> Within [this] one year, the classic is the classic and the tradition is the tradition; if they have nothing to do with each other, that is probably because there are no other bamboo slips about the events documented in the classic to be examined in order to find out the details, thus [Zuo Qiuming] collected other events to fill up the tradition's text for that year.[256]
>
> 一年之內，經自經而傳自傳，若各不相涉者，蓋亦因經所書之事別無簡策可考以知其詳，故別摭他事以補此一年傳文也。

According to this description, the central impetus behind the creation of the *Zuo Tradition* may have been the wish to explain the *Annals*, but the extant documents put a limit on that

[254] Zhao Yi, "Zuozhuan suo ben" 《左傳》所本 (The Basis of the *Zuo Tradition*), in idem, *Gaiyu congkao*, 35.
[255] Present-day students of the *Zuo Tradition* consider this a reflection of the fact that the text was compiled from different sources with the intention to provide "a broad historical setting for the events" recorded in the *Annals*, not as a line-by-line commentary. See Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought. Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722-453 BCE* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 27.
[256] Ibid, 36.

undertaking. Without access to Confucius's teachings, Zuo Qiuming recorded other events, with no apparent purpose beyond filling the gaps that would have otherwise appeared.

Finding fault with many aspects of the *Zuo Tradition*, it was inconceivable to Zhao Yi that its author had been in direct contact with Confucius. Zhao thus portrayed Zuo Qiuming as having based himself on documents, not direct instruction from the sage. This subtly yet unmistakably creates a distance between Zuo Qiuming and Confucius that undermines the former's credibility. To Zhao, this distance explains the weaknesses of the *Zuo Tradition* while simultaneously shielding Confucius from any blame. As shown in the first chapter, Zhao Yi considered Confucius a perfect human being and undermined hints in the sources that he could have erred. Seen against this background, it is a sign of Zhao Yi's consistency that his negative opinion of the *Zuo Tradition* leads him to dissociate Zuo Qiuming from Confucius.

While vocal criticism of the *Zuo Tradition* constituted the exception, scholars were familiar enough with such criticism to recognize how detractors of this text framed their attacks. In the *General Catalog* (*Zongmu* 總目) of the *Complete Library of the Four Categories*, we find an explicit reflection on the importance of the link between Zuo Qiuming and Confucius for the *Zuo Tradition*. This shows that scholars were consciously aware of the way in which their discussions functioned.

In accordance with the format of these introductory notes, a central concern is to establish authorship. In the case of the *Zuo Tradition*, the author recognizes the difficulties posed by obvious anachronisms within the text, such as references to persons that must have lived after Zuo Qiuming had died. Even though he acknowledges some input by later generations, the writer of the entry confidently confirms the authorship of Zuo Qiuming and reveals what he considers the motivation for doubting this ascription:

> Zhao Kuang [late 8th century] of the Tang dynasty first said that Mister Zuo is not Qiuming. Wanting to condemn [the fact] that the tradition is not in accordance with the classic, he probably first had to condemn [the fact] that the creator of the tradition did not receive [instruction in] the classic from Confucius. The principle is identical to that of Wang Bo [1197-1274] who, wanting to condemn the Mao-recension of the *Odes*, first had to condemn [the fact] that the Mao-*Odes* had not been transmitted by Zixia.[257]

[257] "Qinding siku quanshu zongmu, Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhengyi liushi juan" 欽定四庫全書總目，春秋左傳正義六十卷 (General Catalog of the Imperially Commissioned *Complete Library of the Four Categories*, *Correct*

至唐趙匡始謂左氏非丘明，蓋欲攻傳之不合經，必先攻作傳之人非受經於孔子，與王柏欲攻《毛詩》，先攻《毛詩》不傳於子夏，其智一也。

Similar to Cui Shu's confession that the author of the *Zuo Tradition* "cannot but be identified," the anonymous staff member of the *Complete Library*-project responsible for this note shows that he knows the game that everyone plays but few discuss. If a valued text becomes legible through its author and the author receives his authority from another, more important historical figure, the weakest link in the chain is the connection between the author and his mentor. This explains why the discussion gravitated towards the identity of "Mister Zuo" and his relation with Confucius. Anyone who openly attacked the *Zuo Tradition* put himself in direct opposition to the academic mainstream of the 18th century, whereas discussions about the figure of Zuo Qiuming were less charged, even though they could serve the same purpose.

In the chapter on textual scholarship on the *Analects*, the analysis showed that Zhao Yi and Cui Shu were in full agreement that the lore surrounding Confucius was in dire needed of a critical revision. In the case of the *Zuo Tradition's* relation to Confucius, however, they were on opposing sides of the spectrum. Since Zhao Yi found that text of questionable value for the study of the *Annals*, he deduced that its putative author, Zuo Qiuming, had not received his insights directly from Confucius. Accordingly, Zhao changed the portrayal of Zuo Qiuming from a close associate of Confucius to a textual researcher without access to the hallowed knowledge of the sage. Starting from a different problem, Cui Shu's approach mirrored that of Zhao Yi. Doubting the identification of "Mister Zuo" with Zuo Qiuming, which for most scholars of the time constituted proof of the close relation to Confucius, Cui held the *Zuo Tradition* in such high esteem that he was convinced that whoever its author was, he must have been a supporter of Confucius.

The parallel case of the preface to the Odes

Disputes about authors and their relations to other figures arose not only about the *Zuo Tradition*. The preface to the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經) posed similar challenges to scholars. According to a widely accepted version of the story, Confucius edited the *Book of Odes* and Zixia, his direct disciple, wrote the preface that remained a staple of literary theory. Consequently, there exists again a close correlation between how Qing scholars judged the preface and where they

Meaning of the Zuo Tradition to the Annals, Sixty *juan*), quoted in Li Xueqin et. al. (eds.), *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben*, vol. 16, 1a.

stood on Zixia's authorship. The important difference between Zuo Qiuming and Zixia is that in the case of the latter, it was nearly impossible to cast doubt on his relation to Confucius. Scholars thus focused on the link between Zixia and the preface, which shows how they adapted the basic principle to the circumstances.

On one side of the spectrum, Wang Mingsheng considers the Mao 毛-version of the *Book of Odes* along with the preface it contains superior to all competing exegetical traditions. In an essay discussing the authorship of the preface, he affirms that Zixia wrote it and establishes the transmission history of the *Book of Odes*.

> Confucius feared that it would not be transmitted, so he specifically arranged it and gave it to Zixia. Zixia gave it to Mister Mao and wrote a preface for it.[258]
>
> 孔子懼失其傳，特加整比，以授子夏。子夏授毛公，為之作序。

All the key agents in the history of the *Odes* are coming together in this version of the story. First, there is Confucius, believed to be responsible for imbuing the poems with a deeper meaning by ordering and editing the collection. Next, Zixia receives it directly from his teacher and writes the preface. Finally, the namesake of the extant version, Mister Mao, can claim a direct link to Zixia. No gaps impede the flow of knowledge. Against this background, it makes sense that Wang Mingsheng thinks very highly of the Mao-version of the *Odes*:

> The Lu, Qi and Han [versions] are all vulgar learning. The Mao-*Odes* originates from Zixia, it has the most solid basis. This is ancient learning.[259]
>
> 魯、齊、韓皆俗學。毛《詩》出於子夏，最為有本。此古學也。

On the other side of the spectrum, opposite of Wang Mingsheng, Cui Shu finds fault with many aspects of the preface and is convinced that Zixia could not have written it.

> Furthermore, there are many occasions where the preface is not in accord with the meaning of the classic. Comparing it to the historical sources, there are also many errors, and the phrases are a far cry from the *Analects*. It is obvious that it was not written by

[258] Wang Mingsheng, "Shi xu" 詩序 (The Preface to the *Odes*), in idem, *Yi shu bian* 蛾術編 (Compilation of Scholarship Accumulated in an Ant-Like Fashion) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958), 81.
[259] Wang Mingsheng, "Shi xu duan fei Wei Hong suo zuo" 詩序斷非衛宏所作 (The Preface to the *Odes* Was Certainly Not Written by Wei Hong), in idem, *Yi shu bian*, 84.

> Zixia. It was just that someone from the end of the Han or the Wei-Jin period who transmitted the Mao-*Odes* used Zixia's name to make it look important.[260]
>
> 且序之不合於經義者甚多。參之傳記，亦多舛誤，而文詞亦不逮《論語》遠甚。其非子夏所作顯然。不過漢末魏晉之人傳毛《詩》者，借子夏名以為重耳。

Besides issues with the language in which it is written and its uncertain grasp of the historical facts, Cui Shu finds the preface's interpretations questionable. Consequently, he condemns the thesis of Zixia's authorship as untenable and posits that it was written after 200 CE instead, more than half a millennium after what Wang Mingsheng had proposed.

In principle, the examples of Zuo Qiuming and Zixia work in the same way. Both show how Qing scholars used the figure of the author to classify texts according to quality. The complication is that the author-figures are in both cases dependent on someone else for their authority. The example of Zixia is instructive because it demonstrates that scholars had a number of variables at their disposal that they could manipulate. If the text did not live up to their expectations, they could look either at the line connecting text to author, or at the line connecting author to source of authority. In practice, there was no plausible way to disconnect Zixia from Confucius, whereas the connection between Zixia and the preface was contentious and thus an easy target for those who found little value in the preface. In the nexus "Confucius-Zuo Qiuming-*Zuo Tradition,*" every node was open for discussion. Scholars thus reformulated it in various ways, but always in accordance with two principles: First, Confucius was above criticism, so nothing negative was traced back to him. Second, the extant text that scholars could still read constituted the decisive factor. Everything else hinged on how one thought of it. Too little was known about the historical figures behind the texts to enforce any standard version of their story, so their biographies constituted the variables that changed according to the status of the text.

In the end, however, their own stories mattered little. Scholars cared about the lines that linked these authors to Confucius. Thus, we do not read about the personality and the deeds of Zuo Qiuming. We only learn whether he can rightfully claim to have been a close disciple of the master. As Cui Shu's invention of "Master Zuo" makes mercilessly clear, the discourse was not about authors, but about the function of the author to anchor the text.

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[260] Cui Shu, "Zhu-Si kaoxin yulu juan zhi er" 洙泗考信餘錄卷之二 (Additional Record of Seeking What Is Trustworthy in [the History of] Confucius, Second Chapter), in Gu Jiegang (ed.), *Cui Dongbi yishu*, 386a.

The fact that so many Qing scholars took recourse to earlier lore shows that this approach was far from novel; in fact, Qing sources even contain occasional explicit reflections about it, which indicates a conscious awareness resulting from continuous use. In conjunction with the general discourse on authorship and authenticity, the deployment of authorial biography underscores the crucial importance scholars assigned to the figure of the author in their attempts to make sense of, or discredit, any text.

Conclusion

When Qing scholars discussed a text, the historical figure who they thought had written it was invariably part of the equation. This figure anchored the text in the intellectual history of early China. Lacking sufficient weight, however, many of them depended on their associations to other figures to fulfill that function. Usually, this other figure was Confucius, the fountainhead of elite learning. Thus, Qing scholars attempted to establish in detail how the author whose text they were discussing positioned himself towards Confucius. In somewhat simplified terms, pre-imperial China was a world divided between fervent supporters and disgruntled followers of Confucius in the eyes of Qing scholars. Their task was to decide to which side an author belonged, with the ramifications for the writings of this person described above. These filiations gave order to the transmitted documents and established a hierarchy. It comes as no surprise that those who challenged this order included the filiations in their doubts.

This complicates the relation between text and author that played such an important role for the scholarship of the period. Not only the question of the relation between text and author was uncertain; even if an author could be assigned with reasonable certainty, the question of his relation to the rest of the *dramatis personae* of early China remained. The statement "The *Zuo Tradition* was written by Zuo Qiuming" could mean different things to different scholars, depending on whether they saw him as a close associate of Confucius or a later interpreter. Somewhat counterintuitively, severing the connection between the *Zuo Tradition* and Zuo Qiuming could also serve as an expression of respect towards the work. If one assumes that Zuo Qiuming lived long after Confucius, historical accuracy dictates that the record be set straight, which does not necessarily entail lowering the value of the text. Text, author and the author's relations are nodes in a nexus where every connection can be challenged based on the value assigned to the text, which remains the most stable entity despite all the textual criticism.

Against the background that, according to mid-Qing theories of scholarship, every claim needed evidence, the operations scholars undertook with the sources appear ambivalent at best. While they dutifully refer to the texts they consult, the leeway they allow themselves indicates that the sources were secondary to the interpretative concerns that motivated scholars to tackle an issue in the first place. The sources contain accounts that are diametrically opposed in their evaluation of a historical figure, so scholars highlighted those that best supported their claim. Where that did not suffice, scholars proposed a selective reading of a passage and buttressed it with textual and historical research. Evidence was part of the picture, but the way in which the dots were connected mattered far more.

The few reactions to attempts at changing the status of a text by manipulating the image of the author indicate it was not the handling of the sources that drew ire, but the ideological challenges inherent in the attempts. In order to enhance the status of a text, its author required proximity to Confucius. If explicit evidence of interaction was missing, scholars labored to produce proof of compatible worldviews. As their detractors were quick to point out, this led to a blurring of the lines that separated the school of Confucius from its competitors. The basic challenge faced by scholars promoting the study of "master texts" was that they had to sell difference as sameness. Teachings that contradicted those of Confucius had to find a place in a genealogy of early intellectual history that was centered on this very figure and only had space for non-hostile relations. This is the reason behind the painstaking attempts to find links between a certain master and Confucius, even where the evidential foundation of such claims is very thin.

The reactions to such revisions of the authorial biography furthermore indicate that this was a strategy that scholars consciously applied. At the very least, critics were not surprised that those who promoted works that had hitherto been largely neglected used the figure of the author to bring about a more positive evaluation. This degree of reflexivity can be understood in light of the long history of tying texts to people tied to other people. There is little that is qualitatively new about Qing approaches to the issues. However, the strategy played an important role in justifying the interest in these texts that became manifest in the late 18th century. Furthermore, its continuing relevance emphasizes just how central the figure of the author was for Qing dynasty scholarship.

Scholars who engaged in textual scholarship operated in a complex system where text and interpretation were bound to a degree where changes in one aspect reflected back on the other. Since author-ascriptions functioned as signifiers of interpretation, they too were invariably part

of the discourse. Research on neither text nor author took place outside of the process of making sense of the text. Consequently, textual scholarship and historically minded studies on the life of the author yield their full meaning in light of the interpretative issues they concern. Establishing authorship meant fixing an interpretation, and it entailed determining how the author-figure had related to the world around him.

4. All along the fault lines: Scholarly debates and self-reflection around textual studies

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that Chinese scholars in the late 18th century employed a narrow concept of authorship that did not fully accord with how pre-imperial Chinese texts were produced. Some scholars resolved the resulting friction either by proposing a highly selective reading of passages or by arguing their inauthenticity. For 21st-century readers, textual scholarship like this appears dubious, especially since they no longer share the image of antiquity that was prevalent in the Qing 清 (1644-1912). In chapter one I showed that little contemporary opposition arose around the handling of specific issues. In other words, while certain philological arguments were questioned, the prerogative of textual studies to solve interpretative problems and reverence for the sages inherent in those solutions were not. In this chapter I analyze the extent to which this prerogative was sanctioned by—and reflected in—Qing theorizations about philology.

I will not directly address the role of authorship in Qing evidential studies here. In that respect, this chapter is different from the previous ones. However, my analysis of contemporary theories of research and scholarly controversies around practice does show that the narrowing of the concept of authorship had subtle yet far-reaching consequences that did not go unnoticed. That narrowing destabilized the received text and opened opportunities for scholars to propose changes. For critics, this approach bordered on sacrilege. Thus, the motif of the overzealous researcher who meddles with the textual heritage runs through Qing scholars' reflections about the duties and limits of textual scholarship.

To situate these reflections, the first section looks at the theory on which evidential studies rested, as well as certain recurring catchphrases that characterize this kind of scholarship. From these pronouncements, "doubt" emerges as central to the scholar's work. A multi-faceted concept, doubt can first of all be seen as the driving force behind research; this view enjoys wide popularity across the secondary literature on Qing intellectual history, which often stresses that Qing scholars were motivated by doubt regarding interpretations derived from Song 宋 dynasty (960-1279) Neo-Confucianism.[261] There is, however, another form of doubt just as

[261] Yü Ying-shih, "Some Preliminary Observations on the Rise of Ch'ing Confucian Intellectualism," in *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, vol. 11, nos. 1&2, 1975, 112.

prominent in Qing discussions on scholarship: "excessive doubt," which some contemporaries argued led scholars to question things they should not question. They struggled to find a theoretical balance that reined in excess but still allowed for critical research.

How did Qing scholars themselves talk about what they were doing? The sources I use to answer this question are comprised chiefly of theoretical statements and recurrent catchphrases that espoused and justified values such as the importance of a firm evidential basis for any claim and a cautious handling of challenging questions. Connecting these directives to findings from the previous chapters makes it clear that evidential scholars quite consciously set their sights on textual issues, wherein they turned the problem of interpretation into lexical analysis. This was central to their methodology.

Following these more abstract considerations, the second section looks at one of the most controversial evidential scholars of his time: Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735-1815). His contributions to scholarship are well known, but the controversies in which he became entangled are equally impressive, both for their viciousness and their magnitude. The distinguishing feature of Duan Yucai's textual scholarship, especially in his later years, is his focus on "meaning and principle" (*yili* 義理) in the project of collating texts. The scholarly community did not always accept the emendations he made based on this approach, however. At issue in the discussions surrounding Duan and his work was what kind and degree of change to transmitted texts was acceptable. The attacks and Duan's responses reveal how scholars conceived their role in the continuing transmission of early texts.

The scholarly controversies around Duan Yucai show that the theoretical statements and oft-repeated catchphrases highlighted in the first section were not just empty words, but had real consequences for how scholarship was discussed in the late 18th and early 19th century. Controversy erupted around Duan because he stood at the heart of the academic mainstream but employed an approach considered on the very edge of accepted practice. In other words, criticism leveled at Duan Yucai was more than an attack on an individual scholar; it reveals serious fault lines in the foundation of the whole endeavor of evidential studies.

In the third and final section, I relate the critique of evidential studies leveled by Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733-1818) to developments within the scholarly community that have been documented in historical research on the Qing. Weng Fanggang wrote in direct response to the problems of doubt about a work's authenticity, the appropriate use of sources and the role of interpretation. His extensive meditation, comprising more than 6,000 characters in 11 folio

pages, gives a conclusive outline of the challenges evidential studies brought to the table during the 18th century.

Weng wrote from the fringes of the academic mainstream and accused his contemporaries of engaging in scholarship merely for material gain. He also accused them of bias in their handling of sources, to the point where they knew their answer before even looking into a matter. In Weng's eyes, evidential scholarship did not respect the integrity of received texts and overstepped its bounds by questioning things it had no business challenging. His ideal was a more limited version of evidential studies that could be used to solve specific problems but cast no doubt on the sagely teachings.

The relation between the theory and practice of evidential studies is my key focus here. Contemporaneous reflections on Qing scholarly practices attest to a high degree of self-awareness. They help explain some of the habits that have come to be associated with evidential scholars, like the focus on the text and a reluctance to engage in abstract interpretation. With this basic information, the strengths and weaknesses of evidential studies can be assessed: For certain texts, especially when they concern the study of nature or applied technical knowledge, the theory of evidential studies forces a demanding reading strategy upon the reader—one that is ultimately conducive to arriving at an informed interpretation. For other areas of the textual heritage, however, the hermeneutical theory of evidential studies is severely limiting. This limitation becomes especially obvious in the reading of classical texts, concerned as they are with issues of ethics. Abstract interpretation remained a blind spot in the evidential tradition.

The epistemology of evidential studies and the benefits of doubt

In the epistemological system of evidential studies, doubt had its place in the early stages of research, but conclusions reached should ideally rest on a rock-solid foundation. As outlined by Dai Zhen 戴震 (1727-1777) in what constitutes one of the most influential and poignant pronouncements on the theory behind evidential studies, a careful process focused heavily on lexicon and etymology could ensure that no questions were left open. The young Dai who, according to his own account, was unable to afford lessons, had to turn to other aids to arrive at an understanding of the classics: dictionaries.

> Since I was young, my family was poor, so I did not get to have my own teacher. I heard that among the sages, there was one Confucius who had put together the six classics for later generations to see. I looked for one of the classics and opened and read it, but was

left baffled and clueless. Contemplating for some time, I said to myself: The apex of the classics is the Way. What makes the Way clear is their [the classics'] expressions. What forms the expressions are the characters. Understanding the expressions through the characters, and then understanding the Way through the expressions, one should be able to make progress step by step.[262]

僕自少時家貧，不獲親師。聞聖人之中有孔子者，定六經示後之人。求其一經，啟而讀之，茫茫然無覺。尋思之久，計於心曰：經之至者，道也。所以明道者，其詞也。所以成詞者，字也。由字以通其詞，由詞以通其道，必有漸。

According to the hermeneutical model Dai develops here, there exists a direct connection between the meaning of the character, the expressions formed in characters, and the Way. Once the basic elements of the texts are understood, the larger meaning naturally follows, so the most basic textual unit leads the reader to the all-encompassing Way. Or, as Dai puts it in another text: "Once the glosses are clear, the ancient classics are clear."[263] This model considerably alleviates the burden of interpretation in favor of the study of etymology. There is actually no longer any need for interpretation, since the text under scrutiny will become transparent once every character is understood.

Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804), a close associate of Dai Zhen's and another central figure in the scholarly world of his day, laid out a very similar epistemology:

When there are characters, there are glosses; when there are glosses, there is meaning. Glosses are that from which meaning emerges. There is no meaning beyond that which emerges from glosses.[264]

有文字而後有詁訓，有詁訓而後有義理。訓詁者，義理之所由出，非別有義理出乎訓詁之外者也。

[262] Dai Zhen 戴震, "Yu Shi Zhongming lun xue shu" 與是仲明論學書 (Letter to Shi Zhongming Discussing Learning), in *Dongyuan ji* 東原集 (Collection of Dai Zhen), in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Complete Essentials of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), vol. 132, 9.4b.

[263] 故訓明則古經明。Dai Zhen, "Ti Hui Dingyu xiansheng shoujing tu" 題惠定宇先生授經圖 (Inscribing Mister Hui Dong's Chart of the Transmission of the Classics), in *Dongyuan ji*, 11.6a.

[264] Qian Daxin 錢大昕, "Jingji zhuangu xu" 經籍撰詁序 (Preface to *Interpreting the Classical Texts*) in *Qianyan tang ji* 潛研堂集 (Collection from the Hall of Focused Research), in Chen Wenhe 陳文和 (ed.), *Jiading Qian Daxin quanji* 嘉定錢大昕全集 (Complete Collection of Qian Daxin from Jiading) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), vol. 9, 392-393.

In principle, Qian Daxin does not go beyond what Dai Zhen has proposed in his manifesto. Meaning is generated at the lexical level. By explicitly denying the validity of any other source of meaning, however, Qian Daxin accentuates the exclusiveness of Dai's approach. The reader's only task is to establish the correct meaning of the characters; the interpretation of the text follows from this. The principle of engaging with a text at the lexical level is characteristic for evidential studies. It attests to the triumph of "lesser learning" (*xiaoxue* 小學) over "greater learning" (*daxue* 大學), or attention to minute textual details over grand interpretation.[265]

Since lexical analysis plays such a crucial rule, Dai Zhen envisions an encompassing understanding of characters. It entails familiarity with the technical and practical matters to which a character refers. Dai argues that a reader who does not understand, among other things, astronomy, historical architecture and ancient clothing styles will be unable to meaningfully engage the classics. Because the classic work presumes such knowledge from its readers, when the text makes a point, anyone who cannot relate what is described to what existed will certainly miss it. As Dai Zhen puts it in one of his examples:

> When chanting the ancient *Classic of Rites*, the "Rites for Capping Noblemen" comes first, and if one does not know the ancient customs for rooms and clothing, then one loses one's direction and is unable to fathom its utility.[266]
>
> 誦古《禮經》，先《士冠禮》，不知古者宮室、衣服等制，則迷於其方，莫辨其用。

The *Classic of Rites*-chapter in question focuses on the positions of participants in the rite and the clothes they wear. Dai Zhen assumes that each position and each item of clothing has a special significance. Only a reader who can relate the positions to each other and to the general layout of buildings of the time is able to comprehend this rite of passage, and thus the text. This approach firmly establishes technical and applied knowledge as one of the central pillars of philology. In this regard, understanding a character or expression entails not just knowing what it refers to, but knowing the significance of the reference as well. Recognizing that a certain character refers to a certain kind of headwear, as in the example given above, is only the first step; it is equally necessary to know what that kind of headwear signifies in terms of ritual status.

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[265] See also Ori Sela, *China's Philological Turn. Scholars, Textualism, and the Dao in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia UP, 2018), 102-106.
[266] Dai Zhen, "Yu Shi Zhongming lun xue shu," 9.4b

To Dai Zhen and those who agreed with him, reading a text was all about knowing the characters. The limitation of this approach is that it is unable, even unwilling, to account for meaning generated at a level above the purely lexical. It assumes that a text is nothing but the sum of the characters that constitute it. While Dai Zhen takes context decidedly into account by linking the use of a character in one classic to its use in all the other classics, the references remain on the most basic level of the text and do not consider unspoken assumptions that may have guided textual production.[267] Interpretation is thus dissolved into lexical analysis.

The importance and limits of evidence

Focus on the lexicon is the first pillar of evidential studies. The second is the search for evidence, as the name of this tradition of scholarship implies. In theory, nothing can be claimed unless it is backed by evidence, which in most cases means citing passages that support one's argument. When a claim is based on demonstrable proof, there is no room for doubt. Short that, one should not be too quick to put one's trust in something. This mindset is neatly illustrated in an entry from Sun Zhizu's 孫志祖 (1737-1801) notebook:

> Minzi cared for his stepmother and became famous for his filial piety. Hitherto I doubted there was proof [for this] in the writings.[268]
>
> 閔子事後母，以孝著。嘗疑於書傳無徵。

Following this introduction, Sun Zhizu proceeds to outline the provenance of and cite the proof he has found for Minzi's fame. One could discuss any number of passages that work along these lines, but this example is remarkable because it is so unremarkable. It concerns a minor issue, namely the exact circumstances in which the ethical quality of one of Confucius's more important disciples becomes visible. Still, it was a problem for Sun that he and everyone else had been unable to locate proof. Until someone found that proof, Sun Zhizu had reservations about the credibility of this story.

Inherent in the mandatory use of evidence is the reliance on former authorities. While this is not problematic where questions of historical events are concerned, issues of interpretation pose a challenge to this approach. Any evidence that shows *how* a text was read in the past only shows *that* it was read in this way, but does not mean that that reading is correct. Sun Zhizu

[267] Ibid. It is also worth noting that this assumes complete coherence between the classics, which glosses over the temporal distance that separates them from each other.
[268] Sun Zhizu, „Minzi" 閔子, in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 10a.

applies the same approach he had used to substantiate Minzi's fame to the title of the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. The title of that chapter, "Qi wu lun" 齊物論, translates literally to "Balance–things–discourse." There has never been consensus on which characters belong together. Depending on how one interprets the contents of the chapter, one might read back the title as literally, (1) "Discourse on balancing things," or (2) "Balancing things-discourses." That is, the chapter might offer a method for bringing the things of the world into a state of harmony (option 1), or it might constitute an attempt to balance out (and thus bring into alignment) prevailing discourses about the material world (option 2).[269] Sun Zhizu quotes three examples from the Song dynasty that support option 2, but then provides evidence from the 3rd century, a reading that supports option 1. On the latter he comments:

> People of the Jin [dynasty, 265-420] held learning of the mysteries in high regard, yet none of them reads the two characters *wu* and *lun* together [as option 2 does].[270]
>
> 晉人崇尚元 [=玄] 學，然皆不以物論二字連讀也。

"Learning of the mysteries" was a vibrant intellectual trend of early medieval China and based itself heavily on Daoist texts such as the *Laozi* 老子, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經).[271] Sun Zhizu was probably well aware of this when he quoted from a 3rd-century source to support his own interpretation. Since scholars of the Jin were so familiar with the *Zhuangzi*, they would know how to read its chapter titles. To be sure, Sun does not openly give away his own position, nor does he explicitly say that the readings proposed during the Jin dynasty are correct. Yet the way he frames the quotations, including his comment above, strongly implies where his sympathies lay.

As far removed from each other as they might seem, the approaches to the meaning of texts proposed and employed by Dai Zhen and Sun Zhizu have one important common denominator: Both attempt to ascertain meaning without engaging themselves in the act of interpretation. For Dai, the characters produce meaning without requiring the reader's interpretation, while for Sun, a quote that supports one interpretation makes explicit argumentation unnecessary. The

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[269] The present author strongly supports the latter option.

[270] Sun Zhizu, "Qiwu lun" 齊物論 (Discussion on Balancing Things), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 6a. Since the character *xuan* 玄, being part of the personal name of the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (1654-1722), was tabooed during the Qing dynasty, it was commonly replaced with *yuan* 元 when discussing the so-called "learning of the dark."

[271] See Rudolf Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator. Wang Bi on the Laozi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), chapter 1 and passim.

interpretative problem is either bracketed completely or reduced to one that can be solved through recourse to earlier authorities.

The concept of doubt in the theory of evidential studies

According to the Qing ideal, doubt motivated research that reached conclusions that were beyond doubt. The approaches analyzed above offered the means to reach that goal. While the example from Sun Zhizu's notebook may give the impression that anything could be challenged, some of his contemporaries argued there should be limits. We have seen the identification of inauthentic texts was an important part of scholarly practice, but some scholars came to think that authenticity concerns around the classics had been taken too far. These scholars regularly promoted correctives that became the emblematic catchphrases of Qing evidential studies.

Much like reactions to Yan Ruoqu's 閻若璩 (1636-1704) claim that the Old Text chapters of the *Venerated Documents* (*Guwen Shangshu* 古文尚書) were forged, some 18th-century scholars expressed dismay about the practice of dismissing formerly esteemed texts as forgeries. Those dismissals commonly relied on two dicta of Confucius that highlight the master's fondness of antiquity. In the first, Confucius says of himself that he "transmits and does not create, trusts in and cherishes antiquity."[272] In the second passage, Confucius describes himself as someone who does not possess inborn knowledge, but rather "cherishes antiquity and perseveres in searching [out knowledge] there."[273]

Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753-1818) made use of this terminological framework to justify the enterprise of evidential studies in a letter to Zhu Gui 朱珪 (1731-1807), younger brother of the famous patron of many important contemporary scholars, Zhu Yun 朱筠 (1729-1781). After defending the benefits of literary studies, Sun wrote:

> You, my teacher [Zhu Gui], worry that evidential studies and poetry are the best means to ruin literary learning. How do you, then, conceive of evidential studies and poetry? Examining antiquity in accordance with heaven, following the precepts of the

[272] 述而不作，信而好古(…)。 *Analects*, 7.1.
[273] (...) 好古，敏以求之者也。 *Analects*, 7.20.

> regulations, *transmitting and not creating, trusting in and cherishing antiquity*, this too is evidential studies.[274]
>
> 吾師恐考據詞章，為非文學之上乘。亦視其考據詞章何如？稽古同天，祖述憲章，述而不作，信而好古，亦考據也。

Anticipating or perhaps responding to earlier criticism of evidential studies by Zhu Gui, Sun Xingyan reassures him that this kind of scholarship is in complete accordance with core Confucian values. His answer to the rhetorical question he poses draws on expressions from the *Documents*, the *Middle and the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) and the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), all important sources for elite learning. The practices and attitudes described in these texts, Sun Xingyan implies, can be seen as a manifestation of evidential studies *avant la lettre*. Conversely, evidential practice is based in exactly these ways of behaving towards the past.

Later in the same letter, when Sun identifies the reason behind the great success of contemporary scholarship he links it to similar qualities:

> The scholars of today are not willing to explain the classics with haphazard theories. Only by repeatedly looking into the ancient writings of the Three Dynasties, the glosses and sounds, and the forgotten theories of Han dynasty Confucians do they strive to be in accordance with the Way of the sage that consists of *cherishing antiquity and persevering in studying it*. This is why they are superior to the ancients.[275]
>
> 今之學者不肯以臆說解經，惟尋繹三代古書、訓詁聲音及漢儒墜緒，求合於聖人好古敏求之道。此則勝於古人。

In this depiction, 18th-century scholarship is presented as an undertaking that is both deeply Confucian and highly trustworthy. It concerns itself with the model writings of classical antiquity and proceeds by relying on glosses, phonetic studies and the work of Han Confucians, the guiding lights of contemporary scholars. Despite forays into dangerous territory where transmitted texts were questioned and attempts to strip them of their authority made, evidential studies, Sun argues, pose no threat to tradition. That such forays were actually quite frequent is not mentioned. Instead he twice cites the Confucian touchstone that one must trust in and

[274] Sun Xingyan 孫星衍, "Cheng fu zuozhu Zhu Shijun shangshu" 呈覆座主朱石君尚書 (Respectfully Replying to Chief Examiner Minister Zhu Gui), in Wang Yunwu 王云五 (ed.), *Sun Yuanru xiansheng quanji* 孫淵如先生全集 (Complete Collection of Mister Sun Xingyan) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 195-196. Emphasis mine.
[275] Ibid, 198. Emphasis mine.

cherish antiquity in his lengthy letter. This is no coincidence; it is meant to alleviate the apprehension of the elder literatus about evidential scholarship being rash and destructive.

When speaking to his peers, Sun Xingyan explicitly condemned the tendency to doubt the textual heritage. In an essay meant to show that two chapters of the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), the "Regulations of Kings" (*Wangzhi* 王制) and the "Monthly Ordinances" (*Yueling* 月令), were written sometime prior to the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-207 BCE), Sun sharply criticizes scholars who show a proclivity to challenge the authority of the classical works and lists their transgressions:

> Since the Song, they have doubted the "Appended Judgments" [of the *Book of Changes*], criticized the preface to the *Documents*, the *Changes*, and the preface to the *Odes*, demolished the *Rites of Zhou*, slandered the *Annals* (Wang Anshi [1021-1086]), changed the *Classic of Filial Piety*, only took the chapters "Great Learning" and the "Middle and the Mean" from the text of the Younger Dai [i.e., *Record of Rites*] and doubted the other chapters; such cases are too numerous to be counted.[276]
>
> 自宋已來，乃至疑《繫辭》，訾《書序》、《易》、《詩序》，毀《周禮》，謗《春秋》（王安石），改《孝經》，獨取《大學》、《中庸》篇於小戴之書，而疑其餘篇，不一而足。

The list Sun gives here covers all the canonical Five Classics and two of the texts that constitue the Four Books. In effect, this implies nothing has been left standing of the canon as it was originally envisioned. Treating the textual heritage in this way, Sun Xingyan reminds his readers, is not the way to "make classical studies shine brightly in the world."[277] Instead, the textual heritage should be treated according to the vision of Confucius expressed in "trust in and cherish antiquity." Not that Sun advocates blind faith, but he certainly does not support a hermeneutics based in doubt.

The eminent scholar Qian Daxin similarly saw fondness for antiquity as a central value:

> The Six Classics have been established by the highest sage, and if one forfeits the classics, then one lacks the means to engage in learning. The most important part of

[276] Sun Xingyan, "Wangzhi, Yueling fei Qin Han ren suo zhuan bian" 《王制》、《月令》非秦漢人所撰辨 (Analysis that the 'Regulations of Kings' and the 'Monthly Ordinances' Were Not Written by People of the Qin and Han), in Wang Yunwu (ed.), *Sun Yuanru xiansheng quanji*, 304.
[277] Ibid.

> learning about the Way is to cherish antiquity; if one looks down upon antiquity, then one lacks the means to see the Way.[278]
>
> 夫六經定於至聖，舍經則無以為學。學道要於好古，蔑古則無以見道。

In this conception, cherishing antiquity is the prerequisite for a meaningful engagement with the classics. Just as there is no learning without the classics, they will only yield their deeper meaning (what Qian refers to as "the Way") to those who approach them with the right attitude. In a letter that dates to 1755,[279] Qian's close associate Dai Zhen goes so far as to identify the tendency to doubt everything as the defining scholarly flaw of the time:

> I only think that the fault lies in the fact that later generations are unable to thoroughly look into matters; they lightly doubt the past and create without insight.[280]
>
> 余獨以謂病在後人不能徧觀盡識，輕疑前古，不知而作也。

Dai Zhen here connects the proclivity to doubt to one of his central concerns, namely the need to take technical and specialized knowledge into consideration. As explained above, doubt is inherent in evidential studies, which requires proof to back up assertions made. On the other hand, in statements about his scholarly agenda, Dai Zhen declared specialized knowledge to be a necessary condition for a meaningful engagement with classical texts. Without such knowledge, this passage implies, doubts formed will be merely superficial and unjustified. Evidential research is not a vehicle suitable for those who give free rein to doubt and neglect their duty to go beyond superficial flaws. A scholar has to earn the right to doubt transmitted texts by proving himself a thorough and knowledgeable researcher. Dai reverses the Confucian dicta that urge one to transmit instead of create and to cherish antiquity to emphasize that this inverted approach can only turn normal order on its head.

No systematic analysis of the place of doubt within evidential studies was undertaken during the mid-Qing, yet the issue came up repeatedly. What unites these passages is their cautionary tone: There is room for doubt, but more importantly there are also limits. One of the most poignant formulation of the limitations of doubt appears in a discussion of Song dynasty textual

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[278] Qian Daxin, "Jingji zhuangu xu," 393-394.

[279] For a fuller discussion of this text, see Inoue Wataru 井上　亘, "Giko to shinko. Tai Shin 'Yo Ō Naikan Hōkai sho' wo megutte" 「疑古」と「信古」— 戴震「與王内翰鳳喈書」をめぐって (Doubting Antiquity and Trusting Antiquity. Revisiting Dai Zhen's 'Letter to Hanlin Scholar Wang Fengjie'), in *Jinmon kagaku* 人文科学, vol. 13, 2008, 1-15.

[280] Dai Zhen, "Yu Wang neihan Fengxie shu (yihai) 與王内翰鳳喈書(乙亥） (Letter to Hanlin Scholar Wang Fengjie [*yihai* year]), in *Dongyuan ji*, 3.3a.

studies. The question under consideration is whether the bamboo slips in one of the chapters of the *Documents* got misplaced, in which case the text would have to be rearranged. According to Sun Zhizu, no such mistake occurred and there was no justification for claiming it did:

> These discussions of the Song Confucians are all unfounded; they doubted what they should not have doubted.[281]
>
> 此皆宋儒拘墟之論，疑其所不當疑者也。

While the scholarly community certainly demanded critical and informed research, the imperative was to "trust in and cherish antiquity," not dismantle it. Not that there were clear formulations of what "should not be doubted"; the researcher had to know it without being told. Judging from these fragmentary and scattered pronouncements, it appears that doubt had to be confined to issues that did not challenge the authority of the transmitted heritage.

"Be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtable"

The imperative to exercise caution found expression in the catchphrase "be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtable" (*duo wen que yi* 多聞闕疑). This is part of the advice, originally found in *Analects* 2.18, that Confucius gives to a disciple who aspires to an official career.[282] This phrase has received much less attention than its counterpart, the supposed summary of the aim of evidential studies: "to seek what is so in actual facts" (*shi shi qiu shi* 實事求是). Approaching 18th-century intellectual history from the latter perspective highlights the positivist and evidence-based aspects that shaped scholarly work in this period. The focus on the "actual facts" emphasizes the break with the inquiries into metaphysical concepts such as mind (*xin* 心) and principle (*li* 理) that Qing scholars identified as the core of Ming 明 dynasty (1368-1644) scholarship. Qing scholars, by contrast, wanted to be seen as

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[281] Sun Zhizu, "Yaodian wu cuo jian" 《舜典》無錯簡 (There Are No Misplaced Bamboo Slips in the Canon of Yao), in idem, *Dushu cuolu*, 1.6a. A slightly younger contemporary, Peng Zhaosun 彭兆蓀 (1768-1821), confesses that he struggles with the same issue when it comes to Song scholarship: "As for Song Confucians, I most distrust their theories about misplaced bamboo slips." 予於宋儒，最不信錯簡之說 Peng Zhaosun, *Panlan biji* 潘瀾筆記 (Neglibile Notes), in *Congshu jicheng xubian* 叢書集成續編 (Continued Edition of the Complete Collectanea), vol. 22, 429/1.9b.

[282] In its original context in the *Analects*, the last two characters of this sentence are probably better translated as "leave out [i.e., pay no attention to] what is doubtful." As the usage in the 18th century shows, however, this was not how evidential scholars understood this piece of advice. Instead, they used it to stress that in some cases, a question could not be answered satisfactorily because the sources were insufficient. I call this a "catchphrase" because it was never integrated into the theory of evidential studies, yet was often used to argue for a specific approach to this type of scholarship.

working on historical and thus verifiable issues. That this phrase includes the search for "what is so," which could also be translated in a stronger way as "the truth," reflects the confidence of Qing scholars that they could find out what things really had been like in the past.

Compared to "seeking what it so in actual facts," the dictum to "be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtable" betrays a more cautious attitude concerning the scope and certitude of scholarly research. It was the duty of every researcher to possess broad knowledge, but at the same time not to overstep the boundaries of what can be ascertained; if no definitive answer was possible, the problem was to be left unsolved. According to this understanding, doubts were not a bad thing per se, so they did not have to be resolved at all costs. Rather, the limitations of both human insight and the extant sources had to be taken into account.

In the eyes of Qing scholars, the imperative to leave certain matters unresolved was connected to the idea of holding to "trust in antiquity." Consequently, the two expressions sometimes appear together, as in an essay by Wang Zhong 汪中 (1745-1794):

> The past and the present are different, it is fitting that there should be some things that are incomprehensible. Trusting in antiquity and leaving unresolved what is doubtable is acceptable [in such cases].[283]
>
> 古今異，宜其有不可通者。信古而闕疑，可也。

Wang Zhong takes temporal distance into consideration when he suggests that there are cases where the sources cannot give all the answers contemporary readers would like to have. Under such circumstances, the imperative to trust in antiquity necessitates suspending one's doubts and not forcing the text into an answer. Faith in antiquity tells the researcher where to stop asking questions. The perspective is slightly different here when compared to most of the passages discussed above, since Wang Zhong's statement is first of all concerned with content that might be unclear, and not so much with issues such as authenticity. Still, when doubts concerning the authenticity of a text often hinge on dubious content, it becomes clear that the connection that Wang draws sheds light on an important aspect of the larger problem: A lack of faith in antiquity will ultimately lead scholars to treat their sources in inappropriate ways.

[283] Wang Zhong 汪中, "Zhouguan zheng wen" 周官徵文 (Confirming the Text of the *Offices of Zhou*) in idem, *Shu xue* 述學 (Transmitting Learning), in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Complete Essentials of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), vol. 132, 2.10a.

Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (1717-1796) explicitly spells out that for exaggerated distrust towards the received text, "leaving doubts unresolved" is a suitable remedy. In a letter that dates to 1790, Lu discusses the different recensions of the *Analects*:

> Doubting the classics is indeed the flaw of scholars of our times. It starts from the *Analects*; I say that [the recensions from] Qi and Lu merely differ in [some] characters and phrases, it is not the case that the one has something that the other lacks.[284]
>
> 疑經自是近世學者之病。生於《論語》，謂齊、魯不過字句之異，非或有或無。

Lu recognizes that what his scholarly colleagues are doing with the *Analects* is not an isolated instance of suspicions going too far. On the contrary, a lack of respect for even the classics is in complete accordance with the zeitgeist. Like Wang Zhong, Lu points to the teachings of Confucius to counteract this tendency near the end of the same letter:

> Furthermore, to be "broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtable, and talk cautiously about the rest" is certainly what the sage has taught.[285]
>
> 且多聞闕疑，愼言其餘，固聖人之所訓也。

Instead of doubting the repository of Confucius's teachings on textual grounds, Lu urges his contemporaries to take those teachings to heart and live with certain doubts, nagging though they may be. Once new evidence comes to light, so the orthodox theory of evidential studies goes, the problem can be solved. Until then, one is not to rush to conclusions. As Dai Zhen puts it in a letter to Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1732-1815) dated to 1755, "if it is doubtful, leave it, then you will do no harm when mastering the classics."[286]

Finally, Zhu Yun used "be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtable" in a review of Dai Zhen's recension of the *Classic of Waterways with Commentary* (*Shuijing zhu* 水經注). It was Dai's great achievement to clean up this chaotic text, whose extant version dates from the late 5th or early 6th century. In the transmitted version the core text and commentary had been mixed to the point of unintelligibility. Zhu Yun acknowledged what Dai

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[284] Lu Wenchao, "Da Zang sheng Zaidong (Yongtang) shu (gengxu)" 答藏生在東（鏞堂）書（庚戌） (Letter in reply to Mister Zang Zaidong [Yongtang] [*gengxu* year]), in idem, *Baojing tang wen ji* 抱經堂文集 (Collection of Writings from the Hall of Embracing the Classics), in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (First Compilation of the Complete Collection of Collectanea) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), vol. 147, 302. For a detailed analysis of his position on the *Analects*, see chapter 1.

[285] Ibid, 304.

[286] 疑則闕，庶幾治經不害。 Dai Zhen, "Yao xiaolian Jichuan shu (yihai)" 姚孝廉姬傳書（乙亥） (Letter to Recommended Scholar Yao Nai [*yihai* Year]), in *Dongyuan ji*, 9.6a.

had done for the text but insisted there were some points where Dai had erred. He phrased his moderate criticism in a manner characteristic of Qing scholarship:

> And yet sometimes he maybe puts too much faith in his theories and, without doubting, changes something straight away. Even though he is correct in eight or nine out of ten cases, I do not dare fully consider him in accordance with the dictum of the sage Confucius to be "broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtable."[287]
>
> 然或過信其說，不疑而徑改者間有之。雖十得其八九，然於孔聖多聞闕疑之指未敢以為盡然也。

The significance of this passage is that its admonition to exercise caution with respect to received texts is addressed to someone who actively *changed* those texts. Collation, or the comparison of different editions to establish which copy is most faithful to the intention of the original author was a central pillar of Qing scholarship, and possibly a practice whose influence has endured the longest.[288] Important scholarly publishers in the Sinophone world still sell editions of early Chinese texts produced by Qing scholars. Despite their success and longevity, these editions and the practices by which they were made were not uncontroversial even when they were produced. Critics pointed out that they changed what should not be changed and doubted what should not be doubted.

As this section has shown, the methodological pronouncements of mid-Qing scholars premised a correct understanding of a text on the analysis of characters and expressions. Claims about the meaning of characters had to be backed by sources, hence the wave of new interest in dictionaries. The same standard was applied to any claim: only evidence guaranteed credibility. Ideally, everything would be clear if the researcher was able to answer all questions with proof. Qing scholars were realistic enough to see this was an ideal and that the sources were sometimes simply inconclusive. The rule of thumb formulated from this insight harkened back to the Confucian formulation to be "broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtable." This was not understood as an invitation to stop asking questions altogether; rather it cautioned scholars that no matter how widely they read, there will always remain something that cannot be known. In other words, there was a line beyond which knowledge was no longer certain, but

[287] Zhu Yun 朱筠, "Dai shi jiaoding Shuijing zhu shu hou" 戴氏校訂水經注書後 (Postscript to Mister Dai's Collation of the *Classic of Waterways with Commentary*), in Zhu Yun, *Hesi wenji* 笥河文集 (Zhu Yun's Prose Collection) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 104.
[288] Kai Vogelsang, "Introduction," in *Asiatische Studien*, *Heft 3: Textual Scholarship in Chinese studies. Papers from the Munich Conference 2000*, Band 56, 2002, 529-532.

conjectural. When a scholar crossed this line, his peers reminded him in more-or-less strict terms that he had gone too far.

For concrete issues such as historical events or earlier meanings of a character, doubt was domesticated in the scholarly theory that prevailed in the 18th century. Based on the limitations imposed by this approach, an oft-voiced concern was that scholars lacked the proper faith in antiquity and questioned everything. This was a delicate line to draw, since the key imperative of the practice was to remain skeptical until proof had been found. The line, then, rested on the tacit assumption of a gentlemen's agreement: Some things were not to be doubted. Naturally, individual scholars interpreted this differently. There was minimal consensus, however, that canonical texts were off-limits and not to be tampered with.

Contemporary criticism of Duan Yucai's textual scholarship

Judging from the comments of contemporaries like Qian Daxin and Weng Fanggang, Duan Yucai had a reputation for exceeding the limits of the appropriate in his textual scholarship. This is somewhat surprising, given the authoritative status enjoyed by one of his largest projects, the *Commentary on the Explication of Graphs and Analysis of Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注).[289] That Duan, who had been a disciple of Dai Zhen, chose to spend nearly thirty years of his life on this Eastern Han 漢 dynasty (25-220) character dictionary places him at the very center of evidential studies: Han sources were held in exceedingly high regard and dictionaries were esteemed as indispensable tools for determining the meaning of characters. Duan subscribed to the theory of evidential studies proposed by Dai, and in an essay on the interpretation of the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), he wrote:

> That the classics are not clear is because their meaning has been lost. The meaning has been lost because in some cases the sentence divisions have been lost, in some cases the glosses have been lost, and in some cases the reading pronunciation has been lost. Losing all three and being able to get at the meaning is unheard of.[290]

[289] Cf. Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology. Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984), 206.

[290] Duan Yucai, "Zai ming ming de zai qin ming shuo" 在明明德在親民說 (Explanation of 'It Is in Making Illustrious Virtue Shine Bright, It Is in Being Close to the People'), in Zhao Hang 趙航 and Xue Zhengxing 薛正興 (eds.), *Jingyun lou ji* 經韻樓集 (Collection from the Mansion of Classics and Rhymes) (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 57.

經之不明，由失其義理。義理所由失者，或失其句度，或失其故訓，或失其音讀。三者失而義理能得，未之有也。

Like Dai Zhen, Duan proposed that the meaning of a text will become clear once its constituents are deciphered. Besides single characters, which are covered by the terms "glosses" and "reading pronunciations," Duan added the larger unit of the sentence, the parsing of which can be a thorny issue since entirely different readings can be argued by moving the full stop.[291] In terms of his methodology and approach, Duan Yucai can be considered fully representative of 18th-century evidential scholarship.

While Duan Yucai's work was mostly received favorably, his peers took issue with his tendency to change characters. Tellingly, some of them invoked "leave unresolved what is doubtable." Because Duan Yucai's works present a case that negotiates the limits of acceptable interference with the textual heritage, I analyze criticisms directed at his research and the corresponding retorts to determine on what grounds such practice could be justified. What were the standards of validity that Duan and his opponents invoked, and how did these standards relate to the epistemology of evidential studies?

Given that Duan Yucai was part of the scholarly mainstream, it is important to stress that criticism of his work came both from within and outside that mainstream. Qian Daxin is an example of the former type. Qian was an early admirer of Duan's teacher Dai Zhen and helped Dai gain a footing in the scholarly world of the capital in the 1750s. Qian also eagerly supported Dai's theories on how research must be conducted, as I have shown in the first section of this chapter. Despite this common ground, Qian Daxin took issue with one of Duan Yucai's suggestions, the theory on which it was based, and the manner in which Duan made his argument.

Qian Daxin's criticism of Duan Yucai

In a letter Qian sent to Duan, he praised the latter's study of the *Documents*, the *Compilation of Variants in the Old Text Venerated Documents* (*Guwen Shangshu zhuanyi* 古文尚書撰異) as having broken new ground in the research on differences between Old Text and New Text recensions. However, Qian disagrees with Duan's proposition that all quotations from the *Documents* in the early dynastic histories should belong to the New Text tradition. This

[291] For a detailed analysis of one example, see chapter 1, section 3.

conviction led Duan to conclude that in one specific case a character in the received text of one dynastic history should be changed to a variant that accorded with the New Text tradition. Qian Daxin is neither persuaded by this theory nor does he think that these are defensible grounds for emending a received text. The complex reasoning Duan Yucai proposed seemed less than credible to Qian:

> You are of the opinion that [the character for] the river Yang 養 mentioned in the "Treatise [on Geography]" of the *Book of the [Former] Han* and the "Tributes of Yu" does not have the classifier for water, therefore you say that the New Text recension [of the *Documents*] writes it as Yang 養, and thus the *Records of the Historian* should also write it as Yang 養, [it was only that] some shallow person added the water classifier [making it 瀁]. Leaving aside the fact that "the three words 'there probably is' will hardly convince everyone,"[292] I am afraid it is not easy to find a shallow person of this kind in the world. How so? If a shallow person were to change the *Records of the Historian* based on the *Venerated Documents*, he would invariably change the character to Yang 漾. A person who was able to change it to Yang 瀁 would have to have mastered the six rules of character formation. How could such an erudite person be willing to change old texts on a whim? Thus we can ascertain that it cannot be like this.[293]
>
> 足下以《漢志》、《禹貢》"養水"不从水旁，遂謂今文作"養"，《史記》亦當作"養"，淺人增加水旁。無論"莫須有三字，難以服天下"，恐世間如此淺人正不易得。何也？淺人依《尚書》改《史記》，必改為"漾"，其能改作"瀁"者，必係通曉六書之人。豈有通人而肯妄改古書者？此可斷其必不然矣。

The basic question in this exchange is how to account for the character *yang* 瀁 in the name of a river in the *Records of the Historian*. According to Qian's summary of Duan's reasoning, it should originally have been *yang* 養, which is the same character without the classifier for water. It was only that someone who lacked proper understanding added this classifier. Qian, however,

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[292] This is a reference to an anecdote about the general Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142). In the middle of a promising campaign against the Jurchen, who had taken over the territory of the Song dynasty in the north, his rivals at court charged him with treason. In an audience with emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127-1162), one of them said that even though evidence was missing, the incriminating event probably took place. The emperor replied: "How can the three words 'there probably was' convince the world?" Hence the phrase's connection to baseless allegations. The story is recorded in Yue Fei's biography in the *Song shi* 宋史 (History of the Song) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 365.11394.

[293] Qian Daxin, "Yu Duan Ruoying lun Shangshu shu" 與段若膺論尚書書 (Letter to Duan Yucai Discussing the *Venerated Documents*), in *Qianyan tang ji*, 599.

thinks that it would have actually taken someone who *had* the proper understanding to make this change, because it is in accordance with the usual rules for character formation, wherein a character can be used phonetically and new meaning specified by adding to it a classifier. This is what Duan's explanation suggests, and thus Qian topples it: Someone who had the knowledge to change the character according to the rules would not have changed it all. A simpleton, Qian claims, would have opted for the more common homophone *yang* 漾 instead.

The point is not who is correct here. It should be noted that Qian Daxin's theory rests on assumptions just as much as those of Duan Yucai, namely that it is more likely that a character is changed based on phonetical considerations than through the simple addition of three dots that signify water. Duan himself, on the other hand, expects total submission from the *Records* to the textual tradition he has established for it. Only then does his claim that the character variant in one text has influence on the variant in another text make sense. Leaving aside these assumptions, what matters is that a contemporary openly criticized Duan Yucai for taking so much license in dealing with the received text. The significance of this example will become clear once it is seen in connection to other reactions Duan's textual scholarship elicited in the late 18th and early 19th century.

Duan Yucai versus Gu Guangqi

The richest resource for studying the controversial aspects of Duan Yucai's scholarship is his correspondence with Gu Guangqi 顧廣圻 (1766-1835). The unrelenting questioning from this younger contemporary forced Duan to justify his approach in detail. Prior to the sometimes spiteful exchanges, Duan and Gu were on good terms. Gu Guangqi even said of himself that he learned what he knew from Duan.[294] Duan Yucai, for his part, praised Gu in the 1790s in letters to his own friends[295] and requested books from his acquaintances on Gu's behalf.[296] Tension between the two seems to have built up around 1801 over the historical relation between commentary and subcommentary in printed texts: Were they already combined in the Song dynasty or was the subcommentary still printed as a separate physical entity?[297]

[294] Li Qing 李庆, *Gu Qianli yanjiu* 顾千里研究 (Studies on Gu Guangqi) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1989), 28.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid, 43.
[297] Liu Yuejin 刘跃进, "Duan Yucai juanru de liang ci xueshu lunzheng ji qita" 段玉裁卷入的两次学术论证及其他 (Two Academic Disputes in which Duan Yucai Was Embroiled and Other [Issues]), in *Wenshi zhishi* 文史知识, no 7, 2010, 30. Li Qing, *Gu Qianli yanjiu*, 87f.

In late 1806, Gu Guangqi finished a work for his patron Zhang Dunren 張敦仁 (1754-1834) on variants in a Song print of the *Record of Rites*, which resulted in the *Examination of Variants in the Record of Rites with Commentary by Zheng [Xuan]* (*Liji Zheng zhu kaoyi* 禮記鄭注考異). In this text Gu argues that one character in Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127-200) commentary to the chapter "The Meaning of Sacrifices" (*Ji yi* 祭義) should be changed. After he had made this proposition public, Gu and Duan Yucai became locked in a ferocious argument about this one character and its implications for how the Zhou 周 dynasty (11th century-256 BCE) had set up its educational facilities.

The commentary in question is appended to the following sentence from the classic:

> The son of heaven sets up the four schools; when he has to enter school, his eldest son takes his place according to his age.[298]
>
> 天子設四學，當入學，而大子齒。

According to the received text, the commentator Zheng Xuan explained this sentence in the following manner:

> "Four schools" refers to the *yuxiang* [schools] of the Zhou in the four suburbs.[299]
>
> 四學，謂周四郊之虞庠也。

Gu Guangqi argues that there is a mistake in the received version of this phrase. The second *si* 四 (four) should be *xi* 西 (western), thus making it: "'Four schools' refers to the *yuxiang* [schools] of the Zhou in the *western* suburbs." Gu bases his contention on a passage in another chapter of the *Record of Rites*, the "Regulations of Kings" (*Wangzhi* 王制), where the *yuxiang* school is explicitly located in the western suburb, and on the way commentary by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) in the *Correct Meaning of the Five Classics* (*Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義) explains the above-quoted sentence from the classic.[300]

In his earliest responses, Duan Yucai questions Gu's reasoning in a polite yet steadfast manner. Duan's main points are that the Zhou had set up schools of the *yuxiang* type in all four suburban

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[298] Li Xueqin 李學勤 et. al. (eds.), *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (The Correct Meaning of the Record of Rites), in *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben* 十三經注疏整理本 (The Thirteen Classics with Commentary and Subcommentary, Revised Edition) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), vol. 15, 1564.
[299] Ibid, 1564f.
[300] Gu Guangqi, "(Fu) Gu Qianli xuezhi beiwang zhi ji" （附）顧千里學制備忘之記 ([Appendix:] Gu Guangqi's Memorandum on the Institutions of Learning), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 284-286.

districts, and that the commentary by Zheng Xuan would make no sense if one substituted "western suburb" for "four suburbs."[301] The argumentation both Duan and Gu employ in their exchange is subtle and intricate; disentangling it leads deep into comparison of different versions, disparate quotations from relevant texts in other documents, and earlier understandings of the Zhou educational system. Yet throughout the exchange, their arguments remain bound by the limited number of textual sources and the need to explain all references to either "western" or "four" suburbs convincingly by accounting for the way the Zhou rulers taught their subjects and children. The argument had little room for progress, since there was little common ground between Duan and Gu. Instead, the tone got sharper after Gu Guangqi sent an insulting letter and raised the big questions about collation and textual studies: Are there assumptions about the past the researcher is not aware of that guide the emendation of texts? Is it ever appropriate to change a received text?

The objections that Gu Guangqi raises against Duan Yucai are quite similar to the point made by Qian Daxin, namely that Duan took too much license in changing texts. It is ironic, however, that in this case it was Gu who first proposed to change a text, even if it only concerned the commentary. This blind spot in his criticism notwithstanding, Gu makes points that cut to the heart of many evidential studies practices:

> You present grand theories about explicit and unequivocal passages in the classics, wiping them out saying they are miswritten [i.e., they include a wrong character]. All the while you do not consider that they come up again and again and [fit into their contexts] like pieces of a tally. For the explicit and unequivocal passages of commentary that come up again and again and [fit into their contexts] like pieces of a tally, you also wipe those out saying they are miswritten. The repeated occurrences of [the words of] Jia [Gongyan] and Kong [Yingda] in the *Correct Meaning* that in every case [fit into their contexts] like pieces of a tally cannot be wiped out by saying they are miswritten. Thus you change your tactics and wipe them out saying they are incorrect [content-wise]. Thereupon you laboriously call upon and widely quote other classics and other commentaries where there is no explicit text. All this in order to establish your own explanation, which is meant to bring it closer to what you want the explanation to be.

[301] Duan Yucai, "Liji sijiao xiaoxue shuzheng" 禮記四郊小學疏證 (Evidential Analysis that the Four Suburbs All Had Lesser Schools According to the *Record of Rites*), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 259-265. Cf. also Duan Yucai, "Yu Gu Qianli shu" 與顧千里書 (Letter to Gu Guangqi), in ibid, 279.

> And yet, if one looks closely at the explanation thus established, it absolutely does not correspond to the original intention of the classic and the commentary.[302]
>
> 大說於經之明文鑿鑿者，抹殺之曰譌，不計其為一見再見，若合符節也。於注之明文鑿鑿、一見再見亦若合符節者，又悉抹殺之曰譌。於《正義》之累累見賈也、孔也，無不若合符節，不能謂之譌者，則又換一法悉抹殺之曰誤。然後煩稱博引他經、他注之非有明文者。為之自立一說，以就所欲說，然細按所立之說，絶非其經、其注之本旨。

Gu raises a very serious charge: What Duan Yucai really cares about is not the meaning of the classic, but his own explanation, which he projects onto the received text. The strategy he accuses Duan of employing consists of destabilizing the received text by questioning its integrity. Two approaches can achieve this goal. One is the identification of scribal errors. Incorrect characters would have to be changed back to the originals, thereby establishing a new definitive text. The other is a determination of content issues. If all extant versions of a text agree, then the error must have crept in very early. The Qing researcher could only establish this by, in the present case, knowing more about the educational system of the Zhou than had all earlier editors of the text. Gu does not fail to mention the mandatory search for evidence in other texts. The problem he identifies is that sources used to justify one's theory may be less clear than the passage in question. Gu charges that a deduction based on something uncertain is used to change that which is unequivocal. As offensive icing on this already insulting cake, Gu Guangqi accuses Duan Yucai of subscribing to Lu Jiuyuan's 陸九淵 (1139-1193) infamous dictum "The six classics are commentaries on my inborn wisdom."[303]

Putting aside Gu's harsh formulations, his letter gets to the heart of the problem with evidential studies I have outlined in previous chapters: This tradition of scholarship claims to be objective, when in practice it is blind to issues of interpretation. Therefore, evidential scholars are unable to see how their preconceived notions might influence research. The huge apparatus of quotations can support any kind of argument. As I explained in the first chapter, for example, it was possible to argue philologically that Confucius was a flawless sage who could not err in ethical matters. It is suggestive, then, that Gu stresses the ways Duan Yucai supposedly destabilized the received text, since it seems that many who were critical of evidential

[302] Gu Guangqi, "(Fu) Gu Qianli di er zha" （附）顧千里第二札 ([Appendix:] Second Letter by Gu Guangqi), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 280.
[303] 六經注我之故智 Ibid.

scholarship saw the readiness of even prominent practitioners to question the classics as a serious concern. As far as I can tell, no Qing scholar linked the tendency to doubt a received text to concepts of authorship; still, it is significant that these two developments occurred simultaneously, since both proved corrosive to the authority of the textual heritage.

If one takes this larger perspective into account, it is conceivable that Gu's attack has less to do with Duan Yucai as an individual scholar than with mainstream scholarship in general, of which Duan served as a key representative. An overall frustration with the way scholarship was done in his time would go a long way to explain the extremely direct and impolite tone of Gu Guangqi's letter. Tellingly, there is but one short reference in this letter to whether classic and commentary should say "four" or "western" suburbs, the problem that caused the dispute in the first place.

Still, Gu's letter was addressed and sent to Duan Yucai and no one else,[304] and in 1809 Duan wrote a lengthy and equally biting retort. He acknowledged that changing characters was sometimes necessary even though hard evidence was lacking, but justified this approach by referring to the meaning of the text:

> Collating the classics means seeking what is correct. If one knows that a character in the classics is miswritten, one changes it; this was the method of scholars of the Han [dynasty]. Han scholars looked at it from the meaning [of the text], and when it was appropriate to change it, they changed it; there was no need for supporting evidence.[305]
>
> 夫校經者將以求其是也。審知經字有譌，則改之，此漢人法也。漢人求諸義，而當改則改之，不必其有左證。

With this confession, Duan Yucai parts ways with the orthodox understanding of evidential studies: The final arbiter of truth is not evidence, but the proper understanding of the researcher. This claim is not as strong as it may seem at first. One cannot simply dismiss it as an expression of "scholarship relying on subjective arbitrary judgments."[306] Duan Yucai faced different and mutually exclusive versions of a text many times during his research. On what grounds could

[304] Even though letters were usually public documents, unlike the way we think of them today.
[305] Duan Yucai, "Da Gu Qianli shu (yisi)" 答顧千里書（己巳） (Letter in reply to Gu Guangqi [*yisi* year]), ibid, 282.
[306] 显现出主观武断的学风。 Cf. Luo Junfeng 罗军凤, "Lun Duan Yucai de 'yili jiaokan.' Wei Duan, Gu zhi zheng jin yi jie" 论段玉裁的"义理校勘"- 为段、顾之争进一解 (On Duan Yucai's 'collation based on meaning and principle.' A further explication of the dispute between Duan and Gu), in *Xi'an Jitong daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 西安交通大学学报（社会科学版）, vol. 28, no. 3, 2008, 96.

one determine which variant was correct? Obviously, mechanically quoting texts did not suffice, since all theories could be proven by referring to existing variants. One straightforward possibility that Duan sometimes exploited was to take into account the big picture presented by the sources. Arguing on behalf of the Ministry of Rites (*libu* 禮部) that a person with the surname Qiu 邱 was not eligible for the (theoretically hereditary) academic post in honor of Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 because the character was part of the given name, not the surname, Duan resorted to counting:

> There are no fewer than a million occurrences of "Mister Zuo" in Han sources, but "Zuoqiu" is only found once here.[307]
>
> 漢人言左氏者，不下百千萬處，言左邱者，僅一見於是。

Duan admits that one could make a case for Zuoqiu being the surname and then prove it with reference to a text. Still, anyone familiar with the larger body of source material will recognize, Duan argues, that this one occurrence pales to insignificance when compared to the number of sources that support the other case. Mechanically quoting this one passage that supports one's own theory and justifying it by pointing out that "the sources say so" is a gross misunderstanding of how scholarship works.

Especially where single characters are concerned, the most reliable guide to correct reading is the context, which here quite literally means characters surrounding the problematic one. They are assumed to be relatively stable, even when different variants for this one character exist and variations appear over a large timeframe. Duan implies that whichever variant makes more sense in context is to be accepted. One can justifiably say that "such active reliance on the meaning goes beyond a mere positivism."[308] Yet at the same time, "meaning" remains a weak criterion: What had been accepted throughout most of the history of imperial China as part of the sayings of Confucius stopped making sense to Qing scholars, and thus they started to question certain passages. Meaning is determined by contemporary assumptions and understandings. These factors made a relatively sustained discussion about certain *Analects*-

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[307] Duan Yucai, "Bo Shandong xunfu qing yi Qiu xing ren chong xianxian Zuo Qiuming boshi – yi dai libu" 駁山東巡撫請以邱姓人充先賢左邱明博士 議代禮部 (Refuting the Request of the Governor of Shandong To Have a Person Surnamed Qiu Fill Out [the Post of] the Academician in Honor of the Former Worthy Zuo Qiuming – Arguing on Behalf of the Ministry of Rites), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 73.

[308] こうした理への積極的な依存は、単なる実証性を超えたものがある。Hamaguchi Fujio 濱口富士雄, *Shindai kōkyogaku no shisōshi teki kenkyū* 清代考拠学の思想史的研究 (Research on the Intellectual History of Qing Dynasty Evidential Studies) (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1994), 341.

passages possible: Everyone was convinced that Confucius was a person with high standards, even those who did not support the proposed redactions of the text. Scholarship is done by scholars, and with them come personal assumptions and individual tendencies to believe one thing while doubting another.

The debate about collation between Duan Yucai and Gu Guangqi

One final point that certainly informed this controversy but hardly made it to the fore in the letters exchanged was the friction between two approaches to collation. Whereas Duan Yucai favored establishing a definitive edition that imposed changes to the text (now usually called "living collation" *huojiao* 活校), Gu Guangqi defended his approach to leave the received text as it was and only point out variants through commentary (so-called "dead collation" *sijiao* 死校):

> Without taking account of my humble abilities, I attempt to correct the faults, so I always say: Texts have to be collated through non-collation. Do not change the original; this is what "non-collation" means. Being able to know what caused the correct and the erroneous [passages]; this is what "collating it" means.[309]
>
> 廣圻竊不自量思救其弊，每言書必以不校校之；毋改易其本來，不校之謂也。能知其是非得失之所以然，校之之謂也。

Through "non-collation" Gu Guangqi makes the point that it is enough to figure out how the received text came to be, with all its peculiarities. If the received text has been analyzed thoroughly, there is no longer any need to actually change it. This implies that the received text itself has historical value because for a given period it served as the basis for scholarly and public engagement with the work's meaning.

In his first letter to Gu dated to 1809, Duan Yucai took Gu to task for this approach. Duan's counter-argumentation still contains some of the spite that permeates the early stages of the exchange, but only in moderate doses:

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[309] Gu Guangqi 顧廣圻, "Liji kaoyi ba" 禮記考異跋 (Postscript to *Examining Variants in the Record of Rites*), in idem, *Sishizhai ji* 思適齋集 (Collection from the Studio of Appropriate Considerations), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1491, 108/14.3a.

> The aim of collating texts is to establish what is correct and to make the meaning of the sages and worthies shine bright in the world. It is not comparable to the vulgar scholars of the day who boast about broad and rich [knowledge] and brag about being able to engage in evidential studies. (…) Therefore, if the learning of those who print old texts is without insufficiencies, they will settle on a definitive version and make it public; Dai Zhen's [recensions of the] *Rites of the Greater Dai* and *Classic of Waterways with Commentary* are such cases. If they are uncertain about their learning, they will print according to the old versions and not dare to re-arrange a single character; [in such circumstances] it is not appropriate to [merely] collect from different versions and make grand claims about what is correct and what is not. Now you have written the *Examining Variants in the Record of Rites* but do not dare to settle on a definitive version, and still you want to discuss what is correct and what is not. If you were able to do so, then why did you not settle on a definitive version?[310]
>
> 凡校書者，欲定其一是，明賢聖之義理於天下萬世，非如今之俗子，誇博贍，誇能考覈也。(…) 故刊古書者，其學識無憾，則折衷為定本，以行於世，如東原師之《大戴禮》、《水經注》，是也。其學識不能自信，則照舊刊之，不敢措一辭，不當捃摭各本侈口談是非也。今足下為《禮記考異》，既不敢折衷定本，乃欲談是非耶。果能談是非，則何不折衷定本也？

What Gu Guangqi championed as a way to retain the historical appearance of the text Duan dismisses as a lack of confidence in the researcher's insight. If, as Gu claims, the point of non-collation is also to establish what is correct in the end, then why not take the next step and print the text with the relevant changes? This led Duan to assume that "non-collation" was merely an excuse for not being able to distinguish the correct variant and glossed over this shortcoming with a theory that makes a virtue out of necessity.

The issue of the right approach to collation is only of the many that comes up in the early letters. They began with two opinions on the correct emendation of a character in one text but went on to include what evidence that could justify changes to the text, the motivations for making changes, and the personal integrity of the discussants. In the later letters, the exchange normalizes and reverts back to a discussion of the correct understanding of the Zhou dynasty

[310] Duan Yucai, "Da Gu Qianli shu (yisi)," 283.

system of education and partition of territory, which was the only way left to determine whether the text originally spoke of "four suburbs," or the "western suburb."

Present-day scholar Liu Yuejin 刘跃进 is certainly right when he expresses pessimism that the controversy between Duan and Gu could ever come to a fruitful resolution.[311] The two men had reached a deadlock: No further evidence could have changed the mind of either because both were convinced they had figured out how the Zhou educational system was set up. All they could do was to array the relevant passages according to their theories. Once dialog had resumed and the atmosphere had calmed after those heated first letters, both went to great lengths to spell out and prove their views about the Zhou state and its schools. There was no higher authority that could arbitrate since it was the authority of the received text that was challenged and thus limited, and the theoretical toolbox of evidential studies offered no help.

What were the results of this dispute? Not unexpectedly, Gu Guangqi and Duan Yucai broke off contact afterward. The relationship between Gu and Huang Pilie 黄丕烈 (1763-1825), with whom he had often worked closely, also became strained and later ended. One of the reasons for this certainly was the 1808 letter Huang wrote to Duan urging him not to be too harsh on Gu, whom Huang Pilie described as a plump youngster who had not yet paid his dues in the academic world.[312] No consensus was ever reached on how the character with which it all began should be emended.[313]

If Gu Guangqi hoped to achieve something with his direct criticism and challenge to the fundamentals of evidential studies, there is no evidence that he succeeded. Others critical of evidential studies did not unite behind him, nor was the reputation of Duan Yucai or the scholarship he was made to stand for in this controversy visibly tarnished. But the timing of the attack is probably relevant. By the early 19th century, the great scholars who had dominated the discourse of the second half of the 18th century were either very old or had already passed away. It is conceivable that Gu Guangqi was aiming to discredit the old mainstream by taking on Duan. Duan, after all, through the topics of his research and his affiliation with Dai Zhen, can be seen

[311] Liu Yuejin, "Duan Yucai juanru de liang ci xueshu lunzheng ji qita," 33. Tracing the problem back to a friction between the different ways of doing "Han learning" espoused by Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697-1758) and Dai Zhen, however, misses the larger significance. Gu Guangqi's criticism is simply too fundamental to reduce it to an intra-factional dispute.
[312] Li Qing, *Gu Qianli yanjiu*, 129.
[313] The modern editions of the *Record of Rites* that I have consulted do not incorporate Duan Yucai's suggestion.

as the person most representative of the scholarly world of the 18th century still alive in the first decade of the 19th century.

Leaving such larger questions aside, why might Gu Guangqi have felt free to attack Duan Yucai in such a ferocious manner? I have already introduced Qian Daxin's criticism of Duan's textual research at the beginning of this chapter. That criticism came from the center of evidential studies. Weng Fanggang, who had gained the respect of the circle of evidential scholars through his collection of inscriptions, was also very vocal about the quality of Duan Yucai's emendations. Weng furthermore laid out an extensive and detailed critique of evidential studies that marked him as someone who did not share many of their assumptions. His is criticism coming from the fringes of the academic mainstream. In the last part of his critique, Weng discussed the general tendency to read one's own theories into the textual heritage. He saw Duan Yucai as part of this problem:

> Also, in the literary collection of a friend I saw a quote concerning a recent theory by Duan Yucai. He explains that the commentary by Du [Yu] to the sentence, "Any man is a [potential] husband," from the *Zuo Tradition* contains the character *tian* 天 ["heaven," graphically similar to *fu* 夫, the character for "husband"] in several sentences, thus he wants to change it to "Man exhausts heaven." Is this admissible?[314]
>
> 又見一友集中，援近日段玉裁説《左傳》"人盡夫也"句，謂此條杜《註》數句皆有"天"字，欲改云："人盡天也。"可乎？

The final question as to whether this is admissible is rhetorical, since Weng obviously expects the reader to consider Duan's proposal close to nonsensical.[315] Duan Yucai's reputation for overstepping the limits for justifiable emendations made him an easy target. There is no way to tell how much contemporary criticism Gu Guangqi had read, but it is very likely that the criticism quoted throughout this section was merely a manifestation of an opinion shared by a great number of people, and that Gu was aware of the general mood among the educated elite. It is thus possible that he attempted to take advantage of the situation and establish himself as

[314] Weng Fanggang 翁方綱, "Kaoding lun xia zhi san" 考訂論下之三 (Discourse on Evidential Studies, Part C-3), in idem, *Fuchu zhai wenji* 復初齋文集 (Prose Collection from the Studio of Returning to the Beginning), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Continued Complete Library of the Four Categories) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2002), vol. 1455, 418/7.18b.

[315] For Duan's suggestion, see "Yu Yan Houmin Jie lun Zuozhuan yi ze (gengwu)" 與嚴厚民杰論左傳一則（庚午） (Discussing an Issue with the *Zuo Tradition* with Yan Houmin Jie [*gengwu* Year]), in Zhao and Xue, *Jingyun lou ji*, 71.

the spokesperson for the critical spirits. His harsh and sometimes outright insulting language may be explained by his expectation of widespread support for his views. As mentioned above, however, there is no evidence that he succeeded.

Duan Yucai was a scholar who did not "leave unresolved what is doubtable." While he certainly was not one of the more radical textual critics who challenged the authenticity of large parts of the textual heritage and even the integrity of the *Analects*, his tendency to change received texts alarmed some of his contemporaries. Critics of either Duan personally or evidential studies in general did not always distinguish between a radical and a moderate form of evidential studies. Judging from the writings of Weng Fanggang, whom I will discuss in detail in the next section, critics singled out the practice of changing texts at will as a prevalent form of mishandling the textual heritage.

It is no coincidence that scholars levelled this criticism at Duan Yucai on various occasions. [316] Late in his life, he explicitly incorporated the crucial role of the researcher's judgment into his theory of collation. This came at the expense of the role of supporting evidence, which was denied a central place in the argumentation, since Duan recognized that evidence for practically any position could be found somewhere. The Achilles' heel of this approach is that it gives the reader a lot of license when he encounters something that makes no sense to him. Duan Yucai did little more than to provide a theoretical justification for a practice that had long been common among scholars of the mid-Qing.

Weng Fanggang's critique of evidential studies

Weng Fanggang was not only an accomplished official, he also gained respect in the circles of evidential scholars with his research on epigraphy. His most prominent publication was the 1789 study on inscriptions from the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE), the *Record of Inscriptions from the Two Han Dynasties* (*Liang Han jinshi ji* 兩漢金石記). While epigraphy was held in high regard in the late 18th century as an auxiliary discipline,[317] Weng Fanggang did not identify with the project of evidential studies. Rather, he vocally criticized it for grossly neglecting the "meaning and principles" (*yili* 義理) of its research subject and making unfounded changes to

[316] Weng Fanggang, too, had more to say about Duan Yucai's way of doing scholarship. For example, he tellingly opens his "Shu Jintan Duan shi *Han du kao*" 書金壇段氏《漢讀考》 (Reviewing Duan Yucai's *Research on Han-Dynasty Readings*) in the following manner: "For the way of mastering the classics, it is most appropriate to make sure to leave unresolved what is doubtable. It is most inappropriate to engage in changing characters." See Weng Fanggang, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, 504/16.9b.
[317] Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, 67.

various texts. In this section, I place Weng's criticism in the context of the late 18th and early 19th century. Although he did use many of the same catchphrases as his contemporaries, Weng's extensive "Discourse on Evidential Studies" (*Kaoding lun* 考訂論) raises some unique points that show his fundamental opposition to many tenets of evidential scholarship. Furthermore, his "Discourse" brings together many criticisms that otherwise are scattered across the writings of mid-Qing scholars. Weng's "Discourse" manifests the undercurrent of contemporary critical assessments. Its existence demonstrates that the endangered integrity of the text and the unacknowledged influence of interpretation were not trivial concerns, but played a critical role in scholarly discussions.

Weng's conception of evidential studies

Weng Fanggang's "Discourse on Evidential Studies" comprises about 6,000 characters and takes up 11 folio pages in his collected works. Compared to other essays on the theory of scholarship written in the high Qing, the "Discourse" constitutes a major undertaking. It is divided into three parts (*shang zhong xia* 上中下, here given as A, B and C), each of which is subdivided into two (B) or three (A, C) sections (using Chinese numbers, here indicated by roman numbers). To bind the separate parts together, Weng uses a "chorus": The opening sentence, which lays out the central argument of the whole essay, also closes four of the eight parts. It reads:

> Evidential scholarship takes focusing on meaning and principles as its mainstay.[318]
>
> 考訂之學以衷於義理為主。

For Weng, evidential scholarship is merely a means to a correct understand of the meaning and principles inherent in every text. Used in this way, Weng would have no objections to this kind of learning. In reality, however, Weng sees it as just an excuse for many to show off their erudition and so gain distinction in the scholarly world. If not that, it hunts after petty details and loses sight of the greater meaning.[319] Weng explicitly spells out where true and false scholarship part ways:

> Evidential scholarship stands in contrast to baselessly discussing the learning of meaning and principles. In general, those who engage in evidential scholarship wish to

[318] Weng Fanggang, „Kaoding lun shang zhi yi," in *Fuchu zhai wenji*, 412/7.6b.
[319] Ibid, 412/7.6b-7a.

> assist in the search for correct meaning and principles; this is the highest sphere. Simply bragging about one's erudition and analytical skills while ignoring whether meaning and principles are fundamentally true is the first step in going against the Way.[320]
>
> 考訂者，對空談義理之學而言之也。凡所為考訂者，欲以資義理之求是也，而其究也；惟博辨之是炫，而於義理之本然反置不問者，是即畔道之漸所由啟也。

Weng Fanggang links what he sees as the distortion of evidential scholarship as it is actually practiced to the works of Yan Ruoqu 閻若璩 (1636-1704) and Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697-1758). Both had analyzed classical texts and argued that parts of them were later insertions or outright forgeries. Yan had done so for the *Venerated Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書) and Hui for the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經). With these examples, Weng Fanggang draws a close connection between "meaning and principles" and the received text. As his own practice makes clear (see below), Weng further envisions evidential studies as guided by established interpretation. Within a given interpretive framework, evidential studies can help solve specific questions, but they should never challenge the framework itself, as the following passage makes clear:

> In general, evidential research is applied when there is no other way. If there are contradictions concerning a certain affair, one researches it; if theories challenge each other, one researches it; if the meaning is unfathomable, one researches it. When a way is blocked, one clears it; when a person is sick, one administers medicine.[321]
>
> 凡考訂之學，蓋出於不得已。事有歧出，而後考訂之；說有互難，而後考訂之；義有隱僻，而後考訂之。途有塞而後通之，人有病而後藥之也。

Evidential studies is useful when certain problems arise in research and there is no other way to solve them. Here Weng explicitly describes this as a last resort. The comparison to medicine is illuminating: Medical treatment can be very effective if the circumstances call for it, but it can be counterproductive to take medicine when one is healthy. Weng Fanggang argues that the use of evidential research is harmful in situations where it is not called for, and he mentions scholars like Yan Ruoqu and Hui Dong, who challenged the authority of the canon, as having

[320] Ibid.
[321] Weng Fanggang, "Kaoding lun xia zhi yi," 416/7.15a.

done exactly that. Weng's criticism is that of a conservative who considers evidential studies dangerous to enshrined teachings.

Though Weng Fanggang may have second thoughts about the implications of evidential scholarship, he does not deny its overall validity. The opening sentence and chorus of the text already makes clear what good scholarship is founded on: "meaning and principles" are its main pillar.[322] As analyzed above, Weng closely aligns these with the accepted understanding of the classics, but this concept is not the only criterion that he requires from good researchers:

> Speaking about the primary, it is focused on meaning and principles; speaking about the secondary, it is focused on the style of writing; speaking about practice, it is focused on the source on which something is based. When all three are complete, the method of evidential scholarship is completely correct.[323]
>
> 語其大者，則衷之於義理；語其小者，則衷之於文勢；語其實際，則衷之於所据之原處。三者備，而考訂之法盡是矣。

By mentioning "meaning and principles" first and calling them "primary," this quote focuses textual research as envisioned by Weng Fanggang on this aspect. As mentioned above, Weng had disparaged scholars like Hui Dong and Yan Ruoqu for their work that had challenged the status of formerly valued parts of the classics and he specifically criticized them for not paying sufficient attention to meaning and principles. This again highlights Weng's rejection of evidential scholarship that claimed to focus on finding the truth without regard for other concerns, including interpretation.

The focus on meaning and principles is complemented by an eye for the way the texts use language and careful consideration of the source used to back a claim. Weng elaborates on the question of sources in part A-2 of the "Discourse," though the focus remains on meaning and principles. He draws a distinction between different kinds of histories, for example, when researching events. Is the source an official history (*zhengshi* 正史) or an unofficial one (*yeshi* 野史)? Even with the official histories, Weng requires the researcher to look for corroborating evidence in other sources.[324] Regardless of the source, however, Weng insists that the consideration of meaning and principles governs the decision whether to apply one's text-

[322] Ibid, 412/7.6b.
[323] Ibid, 413/7.8a. I assume that Weng Fanggang uses the characters *da* 大 and *xiao* 小 (big and small, respectively) in this passage to express a sense of hierarchy, hence the translation as "primary" and "secondary."
[324] Weng Fanggang, "Kaoding lun shang zhi er," 413/7.8b.

critical tools at all: "There is no need to employ evidential learning to argue against the records of rural songs common in the hamlets and widely circulated exhortations to do good if they accord with meaning and principles."[325] While Weng does not explain this, from the context it seems probable that he thinks these kinds of works, being simple folk tales, contain historical accuracies that would invite textual criticism. Undertaking such a project, Weng implies, would be meaningless since there is nothing wrong with the values they promote.

Weng's criticism of contemporary scholarship

When it comes to his standards for evidential research, Weng Fanggang largely agrees with his contemporaries. He lists three criteria that anyone must fulfill to qualify for the title of "evidential scholar:"

> Being broadly knowledgeable, leaving unresolved what is doubtable, and being careful when speaking. When all three are given, then the Way of evidential scholarship is complete.[326]
>
> 曰多聞、曰闕疑、曰慎言。三者備而考訂之道盡於是矣。

Judging from Weng's explanation in part 3-A, his understanding of these phrases does not differ fundamentally from that of other scholars of his time. Like them, he stresses that where evidence is insufficient, the researcher should abstain from pursuing the question further. What is remarkable, however, is the frequency with which Weng reminds others to "leave unresolved what is doubtable."[327]

This emphasis, as the first section of this chapter has shown, was not innocent by the year 1800, because scholars had used it to argue for a more limited understanding of evidential research. Weng Fanggang was not only an avid promoter of this catchphrase, he also employed it to frame major issues he had with how evidential scholarship was used. His condemnation of the contemporary academic world went much further than anything his colleagues left recorded in

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[325]即里俗鄉曲、傳誦勸善之文，苟其合於義理者，即無庸執考訂之學以駁難之。 Ibid, 413/7.9a.

[326] Weng Fanggang, "Kaoding lun xia zhi er," 416/7.15b/-417/7.16a. "Being careful when speaking" is part of the same *Analects*-passage in which the catchphrase "being broadly knowledgeable and leaving unresolved what is doubtable" appears.

[327] Besides the review of one of Duan Yucai's works mentioned in footnote 316, the following texts show Weng's emphasis of "leaving unresolved what is doubtable:" "Da youren xiaodu" 答友人小牘 (Small Epistle in Reply to a Friend), in Weng Fanggang, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, 452/11.16a. "Yu Wu Lanxue shu er tong" 與吳蘭雪書二通 (Letter to Wu Lanxue, Second Exchange), ibid, 547/11.27b. "*Yu Chen Shishi lun kaoding shu*" 與陳石士論考訂書 (Letter to Chen Shishi Discussing Evidential Studies), ibid, 451/11.15a. This slogan also repeatedly comes up in the "Discourse on Evidential Studies."

writing. Weng may have acknowledged the validity of evidential studies in general, but he rejected how many scholars actually practiced it:

> As to not wanting to leave unresolved what is undoubtable, or being unwilling to do so, this is the greatest error. Those who talk about evidential scholarship today mutually encourage each other to commit [this error]; all of them are like this. How so? They are not impartial, do not disregard their own preferences, and suffer from the fault of wanting to come out first [as if it was a contest]. Before having engaged in research, they already have the answer in their minds.[328]
>
> 至於不肯闕疑、不甘闕疑，則其弊最大。今之言考訂者，相率而蹈之者，比比皆是也。何者？不平心、不虛已，而好勝之害中之也。未考訂之前已有胸中成例在矣。

Not only were researchers willing to push their sources beyond acceptable limits by making claims that could not be verified, they also engaged in research just to support what they already assumed to know. The genuine quest for knowledge, Weng charges, is dead. Rather, he claims, evidential research was a veiled way of showing off one's erudition and originality without considering whether the results were defensible or in line with meaning and principles.[329] As Weng puts it early in the "Discourse," scholars "consider evidential scholarship an easy way to stand out."[330]

In the eyes of Weng Fanggang, the noble ideals by which evidential scholarship justified itself merely masked the struggle for attention within the circles of the scholarly elite. His criticism hints at the negative side of specialization and its link to remuneration. In a world where even the top graduates of the civil service examination had to wait years for a post, scholars had to find other ways to make a living. Some turned to the academies, where they taught and shaped the intellectual orientations of their home institutions, all the while still publishing their own research. Others worked as secretaries on the staff of accomplished officials, who sponsored research projects on a scale unavailable to individual scholars, and these projects needed specialists to carry out the work. Finally, massive state-sponsored projects promised both salary and distinction for those involved. The book collection project *Complete Writings of the Four*

[328] Weng Fanggang, "Kaoding lun xia zhi er," 417/7.16a-417/7.16b.
[329] Idem, "Kaoding lun shang zhi yi," 412/7.7a.
[330] 以考訂為易於見長。 Ibid, 412/7.7b.

Treasuries (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書) of the 1770s and 1780s is certainly the most famous example of this, but far from the only one of its kind.[331]

Such posts and assignments were awarded on the basis on merit, at least on paper. One had to be known as a specialist in a certain field to be eligible. This turned academic publications into a currency, a kind of social capital, with which one could gain access to such positions. This is where Weng's criticism sets in: Whether one's research results were factually correct (never mind in accordance with accepted teachings) was less important than having something that proved one's erudition and originality. Weng implies that scholars would neglect their responsibilities as researchers to produce results. Under these circumstances, research was no longer disinterested because it affected the social and economic standing of the researcher, and the results suffered accordingly. Weng Fanggang does not directly connect his critique to this background, but the points he makes are fully congruent with these consequences: Scholarship had become something that scholars used to stand out.

The final sentence of the quote given above also deserves careful contextualization: "Before having engaged in research, they already have the answer in their mind." Weng Fanggang does not explain why he thinks this damning criticism is justified; it is conceivable that he mentions it to emphasize scholarship's lack of impartiality. Judging from this usage, impartiality has far-reaching connotations: The scholars Weng condemns are partial to the extent that the sources they encounter in the course of their research do not challenge their assumptions, but are instead fit into their pre-conceived framework.

Weng Fanggang did not invent strawmen that he could scold to score a rhetorical point. As we saw above in Qing discussions of the *Analects*, challenging the received text rather than questioning one's pre-conceived ideas was common practice among the more radical scholars. Research did not mean a quest for answers, since, as Weng points out, the answers were known to such scholars all along. Evidential research had become the means and justification for imprinting one's judgment into the text. As Weng formulated it, the terminology used by evidential scholars might appear innocent at first sight, but it actually betrayed egregious malpractice:

[331] Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, 104-129. See also the section on the historical background of Qing dynasty evidential studies in the introduction of this dissertation.

> Speaking of correcting errors opens the door to the mistake of presumptuously changing; speaking of misplaced bamboo slips opens [the door to] the mistake of presumptuously creating.[332]
>
> 言正誤，則開妄改之獘，言錯簡，則開妄作之獘。

For the uninitiated, talk of "correcting mistakes" and "misplaced bamboo slips" may seem like normal parts of textual research, especially considering the disorderly state of some received texts. Weng Fanggang, however, claims to see right through this pose and translates for his audience where such an approach leads. He criticizes scholars who claim to bring order to chaos for merely justifying making unwarranted changes to their subject texts.

Weng's assessment of evidential studies gives an overview of scholarly practices in the late 18th and early 19th century from a critical perspective. His observations can be fruitfully connected to many trends that modern-day scholarship on this period has identified as shaping the academic world of the Qing. He decries the fact that scholarship is no longer an end in itself, but a way to make a name for oneself in a competitive job market. This, Weng claims, leads the researcher to put external considerations like originality ahead of coming to defensible conclusions. Weng further condemns scholars for using the evidential tools like an awareness of errors in transmission, to destabilize a received text. Like other critics of his day, he singles out Duan Yucai as someone prone to propose substantial revisions.

Weng's approach to evidential studies and his own practice

Weng Fanggang's perspective was that of a conservative whose ire was most of all directed at the practice of questioning the accepted interpretation of a text using philological analysis. He views the disrespect for "meaning and principles" as the root of all evil and explicitly approves evidential scholarship that is exclusively used to solve questions within that established framework. His own interpretative work makes it possible to see what this meant in practice. The *Appended Notes on the Analects* (*Lunyu fuji* 論語附記) represents Weng's engagement with the *Analects*. It weighs in on issues of "meaning and principle" and employs the language and tools of evidential research. Its form is telling in that the entries regularly begin with a quotation of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130-1200) explanation of the *Analects* passage in question. Weng

[332] Weng Fanggang, „Kaoding lun shang zhi yi," 413/7.8a.

praises Zhu Xi in no uncertain terms as an unprejudiced interpreter,[333] and when he questions Zhu, Weng does so in a very careful manner. This implies that his goal was not topple Zhu's interpretations, but rather to refine and supplement them. For example, Weng disagreed with Zhu about the identity of Zuo Qiuming, but affirmed Zhu's judgment of Zuo's reliability.[334] Weng had no reservations about using evidential research to correct factual errors, but he was much more careful where interpretations were concerned.

There is an *Analects* passage where Confucius bemoans the fact that he does not dream about the Duke of Zhou (Zhou *gong* 周公) anymore.[335] Zhu Xi's commentary states that in his prime years, Confucius had the intention to put the way of the Duke of Zhou into practice. However, in his old age, Zhu continues, Confucius was no longer able to practice it, and thus "he no longer had this mindset (*xin* 心), and also no longer had these dreams."[336] Weng Fanggang disagrees with this interpretation, yet makes his case in a careful manner that shows he fully accepts the exegetical framework Zhu Xi had put into place:

> I humbly have some doubts. Thinking [as Zhu Xi does] that the mind of the sage "does not allow him to sigh [in despair] even for a moment," it is permissible to say that "he [Confucius] no longer had these dreams," but it is not permissible to say that "he no longer had this mindset.[337]
>
> 竊有所疑。以為聖人之心"一息未容稍慨，"謂"無復是夢"則可。謂"無復是心"則不可。

Does the sage despair over his lifelong failure to restore the ideal society of the past? In his commentary on the passage about Confucius no longer dreaming about the Duke of Zhou, Zhu Xi implies just that when he explains that the disappearance of the dreams reflects the disappearance of the will to implement the way of the Duke of Zhou. Weng Fanggang admits that the dreams about the Duke of Zhou may have stopped, since the passage explicitly states so. However, he disagrees that this equates to Confucius giving up on his quest, a crucial

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[333] 足見朱子之虛心至也。 Weng Fanggang, *Lunyu fuji* 論語附記 (Appended Notes on the *Analects*), in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (First Compilation of the Complete Collection of Collectanea) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), vol. 32, 26.
[334] Ibid, 22.
[335] *Analects*, 7.5.
[336] Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Collected commentaries to the chapters and verses of the Four Books) (Taibei: Changan chubanshe, 1991), 94.
[337] Weng Fanggang, *Lunyu fuji*, 24. The passage about sighing is a paraphrase of Zhu Xi's comment on *Analects* 8.7. See Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, 104. Note that *Analects* 8.7 records a statement of the disciple Zengzi 曾子 about the ideal person (*junzi* 君子) and does not contain any obvious reference to Confucius.

distinction Weng makes given its implications about the character of Confucius. The fact that Weng points to a different passage of Zhu Xi's commentary to make his case emphasizes the importance Weng attaches to Zhu's exegesis.

A second important feature of the *Appended Notes* is Weng's evident caution, which made him such a firm believer in the attitude of "leaving unresolved what is doubtable." In one entry, he criticizes readers who look for answers where Weng thinks none are to be found:

> I do not know why everyone has to induce and infer, as if they had seen the contemporary events with their own eyes. This is a common pitfall of explaining the classics.[338]
>
> 不知諸家何為而必為之演測推論，若親見當日情事。此說經之通弊也。

Weng is concerned by his contemporaries' inability to recognize where to stop asking questions. At some point, he implies, adding inference upon inference becomes mere guesswork, as there is only a limited amount of information one can draw out from the written record. Weng makes few explicit statements about specific interpretations. In keeping with his own pronouncements, he primarily researches cases where he can improve factual accuracy but refrains from challenging Zhu Xi. Where there is no illness, applying medicine is superfluous.

Weng took the middle ground between rejecting and embracing evidential scholarship, probably because he had gained the respect of evidential scholars with his work on epigraphy, while his writings on textual issues were much less in accordance with the academic mainstream. This helps explain why it was Weng Fanggang who produced the most extensive piece of writing explicitly discussing evidential scholarship. Those who dismissed this kind of learning did not go into such depth, while the defenders restricted themselves to shorter theoretical statements, or invested their energy in establishing a genealogy for themselves. Whatever his motivations, Weng Fanggang's "Discourse on Evidential Studies" presents a competing ideal that offers an early critical characterization of scholarship as practiced during the middle of the Qing dynasty.

Conclusion

From theoretical statements to heated philological controversies, Qing scholars produced a set of writings that allows us a glimpse into how they themselves thought about their research.

[338] Weng Fanggang, *Lunyu fuji*, 46.

Their reflections show that the central issue was what role interpretation (or "meaning and principle," as contemporaries called it) should play in research. Those whom we describe as mainstream evidential scholars like Dai Zhen, Duan Yucai and Qian Daxin subscribed to a hermeneutical model according to which meaning would become evident once all the characters constituting a text were understood through lexical analysis. Weng Fanggang, writing from a different perspective, argued that "meaning and principles" should determine where scholars could apply the tools of evidential research.

The tension between a lack of interpretative methods in the theoretical toolbox and the non-neutrality of evidential research goes to the heart of controversies in and about this scholarship. Scholars claimed to be uninterested in doctrinal questions, and possibly conceived of themselves in such a way when, in their theoretical pronouncements, they reduced the interpretation of a text to the lexical question of understanding characters correctly. However, the less a scholar subscribed to the agenda of evidential studies, the more likely he was to perceive such research, as Yao Nai put it, as something that "comes in handy to respond to enemies and leaves the defenders [of opposing views] dumbfounded"[339]—thus anything but neutral.

The debate between Duan Yucai and Gu Guangqi is emblematic of the tension between supposedly objective textual emendations and matters of interpretation. While they had opposite views about the locale of ancient educational facilities, both scholars believed they commanded the necessary sources to back their claims. Their exchange oscillated between a dispute about interpretation and contention about textual sources. With no clear distinction between these two issues, their debate shows that even though evidential scholars normally did not explicitly consider interpretation in their theoretical pronunciations, such issues remained central to their research. How scholars understood a single character was linked to their interpretation of the text as a whole and changing it could have ramifications for the entire exegetical enterprise.

While the limitations that received interpretations imposed on evidential scholarship remained largely outside the scope of discussion, scholars nevertheless were aware of its corrosive potential. The central role played by the concept of doubt emphasizes this problem. While it was a necessary starting point for critical scholarship, exactly how far it could and should be

[339] 夫以考證斷者，利以應敵，使護之者不能出一辭。 Yao Nai 姚鼐, "Laozi zhangyi xu" 老子章義序 (Preface to *Meaning of the Laozi, Chapter by Chapter*), in idem, *Xibaoxuan quanji* 惜抱軒全集 (Complete Collection of Yao Nai's Works) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991), 22.

pushed remained a matter of dispute. Were the classics off limits? Were received texts or interpretations? Doubts were a double-edged sword that could easily turn from constructive to destructive and thus had to be reined in. Scholars fell back on the admonition "to be broadly knowledgeable and leave unresolved what is doubtable" to negotiate the boundaries of ascertainable knowledge.

Taking a step back from deliberations about the limits of evidential scholarship analyzed in this chapter, we can understand Qing scholars' uncertainty about the appropriate scope of criticism as a reflection of the growing instability of the received text. With widespread currency of the narrow concept of authorship, the name of an author no longer held a work together. The extent to which this sanctioned efforts of scholars to emend and revise received texts became fundamental to all Qing discussions about the purpose of scholarship.

Conclusion

Scholars who lived during the Qing 清 dynasty (1644-1912) hardly ever engaged in metaphysical speculation.[340] Instead, they focused their energies on philology, sticking to verifiable issues such as pronunciation, historical details and character glosses. This does not mean, however, that abstract interpretations did not play a role in their work. On the contrary, interpretation shaped Qing scholarship to its very core. It was only the *act* of interpreting that often remained conspicuously absent from their writings.

Qing scholarship was marked by a distrust towards received texts. While this distrust was partly due to the awareness of the long history of transmission behind every text, the most destabilizing factor was the concept of authorship prevalent among scholars. Scholars had the ideal that the originator of the content was identical to the author – a narrow concept of authorship. However, as they were well aware, most early Chinese texts were written by followers of the originators, an insight that was at odds with their concept of authorship. Qing scholars considered these followers to have possessed agency, and they expected the quality of the teachings to decline as they were transmitted over time. They did not think of the texts they were able to read in the 18th century as necessarily in accordance with the teachings of the originator. Only a thorough critique of the received text could potentially ascertain to what extent a text reflected the views of the person to whom it owed its name. Scholars thus proposed changes that would have brought the text more in line with the narrow concept of authorship. This concept remained the ideal, while everything else was treated as a deviation from the rule.

Even though Qing scholarly practice was based on philology, scholars relied on purist interpretations that centered on one assumption: The sages of antiquity never erred in ethical matters. Together with the narrow concept of authorship, this gave them both the motivation and the means to question the authority of the received texts and propose changes to bring them more in line with their own expectations. Scholars developed many arguments of philological merit that, to varying degrees, served this goal.

Against the background of the prevalence of the narrow concept of authorship and the tendency to defend purist interpretations of the past, how did Qing scholars read pre-imperial texts? Through a case study of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), I have shown in my first chapter that the

[340] Cui Shu's 崔述 (1740-1816) impatience with scholars who wasted their time on "human nature and fate" (*xing ming* 性命) is symptomatic in that regard; he makes clear that they should instead have looked at the real manifestation of the Way, namely the actions of Confucius. See chapter 1, part 3.

potential presence of the disciples' voices stimulated attempts to separate their input from the genuine wisdom of their master, Confucius. For Qing scholars who attempted to salvage the authority of the text, challenges came from two sides: First, the narrow concept of authorship drew attention to the then-accepted understanding that second-generation disciples of Confucius had put the text together, which gave rise to the question of how much genuine "Confucius" the *Analects* actually contained. Second, some of the stories could be understood in ways that Qing scholars could not bring into accordance with their idealized image of Confucius. In their responses to the challenges, Qing scholars destabilized the received text of the *Analects* by developing increasingly fine-grained theories of its messy textual history, while their image of Confucius as a flawless sage was reinforced. Scholars labored to identify individual contributions to a text without reflecting on the concept on which their work was based.

In the second chapter, I addressed criticism of the narrow concept of authorship. Some scholars argued that it was inappropriate for the study of pre-imperial texts, and relied on an inclusive concept of authorship instead, which acknowledged as valid every contribution to a text during its long process of creation. While this formulation did not attract much attention at the time, the discussions about the *Venerated Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書) show that scholars were sometimes willing to defend a text based on this principle. Some scholars adopted the inclusive concept of authorship to generate a more accurate picture of textual production, yet at the same time, others also used it to defend the value of disputed texts.

On its own, the concept of authorship that Qing scholars applied does not suffice to explain the directions their work took. In general, they used the narrow concept to dissect received texts, and the inclusive concept to keep them intact. However, which texts they chose to dissect and which to defend depended on other variables, such as the status of the text and the acceptability of its content. The concept of authorship was a central factor, as evidenced by the attention Qing scholars paid to the question of responsibility for a text, but it was not the only one. The weight of tradition that kept existing interpretative frameworks in place and the period-specific social conservatism were decisive for how scholars approached a text. This interplay between concept and interpretation characterizes Qing dynasty evidential studies.

The third chapter addressed the centrality of the author-figure. Through an analysis of the imagined relationships between historical figures to whom text were ascribed, I argue that for Qing scholars, a text became legible through its author. They needed the figure of the author to

anchor a text within intellectual history; without it, the lack of pedigree and the concomitant shadow of uncertainty were constant threats to the status of a text. The biographical data that scholars assembled reflect this purpose: The more important scholars considered the text to be, the more sympathetic their portrayal of the author. This biographical data, especially the author's interactions with and links to other historical figures, was an expression of how scholars read the text.

The fourth and final chapter took a step back from the discussions about author ascriptions and author figures to study the consequences that the more stringent application of the narrow concept of authorship had on scholarship in general. While they did not draw the connection to authorship, contemporaries realized, often with alarm, that some scholars gave themselves a lot of leeway in their handling of received texts. Philology came to be seen as a threat to the textual heritage. To what extent do theories of scholarship and intellectual controversies reflect the growing instability of texts that the narrow concept of authorship had caused? The urge to exercise caution when amending the received text permeates many of the discussions about evidential scholarship, and controversies regularly erupted over the justifiability of amendments. Both developments make clear that contemporaries were fully aware of the corrosive potential inherent in evidential scholarship. Critics blamed their colleagues' preconceptions and over-confidence in their own judgment for the transgressions. These apprehensions mirror the prevalent use of the narrow concept of authorship.

Beyond the way in which it functioned in Qing philology discussed so far, the question arises when the nimbus of the founding figures began to fade and reference to them no longer sufficed to hold the works ascribed to them together. In this dissertation I have described the effects of the narrow concept of authorship when it had already reached the academic mainstream. How it got there, and how this relates to the rise of evidential studies more generally, is a question that remains open for future research.

Some comparative observations on authorship in early modern philology

In their introduction to a recent volume on authorship in East Asian literatures, Schwermann and Steineck have argued that the concept of the author as "an omnipotent source of the text

and its meaning" is "firmly embedded in European classical modernity."[341] The legal[342] and intellectual[343] developments that accompanied the birth of the modern author in Europe are well documented, and to my knowledge, no comparable research on China exists. However, it is necessary to distinguish between authorship in literary theory and authorship in philological research. While these two aspects are not mutually exclusive, literary theory usually contemplates the relationship between the two known entities of text and author, whereas philology faces a different set of challenges. It might be the case that it first has to establish such a relation, that little about the author is known other than his name, or that the text is of uncertain pedigree. Philology has to deal with at least one unknown in the equation. Yet, it shares the assumption that the author is the principle source of meaning, an aspect that is not unique to Europe, as this study has shown.

The author that allegedly died in the 20th century was the conscious subject,[344] the inspired genius celebrated by the romanticists. Whether or not rumors of his demise are exaggerated, this figure indeed originates from early modern Europe. However, the author as an organizational principle of the textual heritage is both older and more universal than that, though not timeless. Grasping its role in textual scholarship and its transformations, both globally and over time, would enhance our understanding of the trajectories along which philology developed by showing how disparate phenomena relate to this one concept. The concept of authorship is not the only factor that shaped early modern philology, but it functioned as a catalyst that caused, or at least intensified, other tendencies. A theory of authorship in philology is required to complement the theories of the author proposed for literature. At this point, I can only offer some preliminary observations based on the results of this study and the findings in the secondary literature on Europe that point towards a theory of the author in early modern philology.

Looking at European philology in the late 18th century, a tendency to historicize the author-function emerges. While the human authors of individual books of the Bible received heightened attention as scholars inquired into their historical circumstances, the figure of

[341] Raji Steineck and Christian Schwermann, "Introduction," in idem (eds.), *That Wonderful Composite Called Author. Authorship in East Asian Literatures from the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1.
[342] Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market. Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), esp. 35-55.
[343] Jochen Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik, 1750-1945. Bd. 1: Von der Aufklärung bis zum Idealismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985).
[344] For a thorough critique of this narrative, see Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author. Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*, 3rd edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008 [1992]), 10-14.

Homer began to dissolve once Friedrich August Wolf (1758-1824) considered the possibility that he had never existed.[345] Viewed at the most abstract level, European philologists separated compilations dating to the early periods of recorded history into their components and analyzed them accordingly. Their "authors" were no longer a monolithic entity, but a series of historical agents. These agents were authors in the narrow sense, and their individual experiences mattered. Philologists oscillated between a critical acceptance of revised author ascriptions (Bible) and their dissolution (Homer).[346]

Textual scholarship of the mid-Qing worked along very similar lines. Textual critics questioned the link between a figure and the compilation bearing his name and either looked towards individual contributing actors or the dynamic process of textual accumulation to explain textual production. References to founding figures such as Confucius or Zhuangzi 莊子 no longer sufficed to bind together multi-layered works that may have needed centuries to take shape. Depending on the level of detail in the surviving historical records, the writer needed to be grasped as an individual agent in order not to disappear in the fog of history. Scholars required him to be an individual, of flesh and bone, endowed with verifiable agency; otherwise the author was of very limited use to them.

Judging from these parallel developments in early modern European and Chinese philology, scholars historicized and, to some extent, de-mythologized the role of the author-figure. A certain spiritual inspiration that the human authors of the Bible and the followers of Chinese masters may have received could no longer explain what they wrote; only history could. The received text *as text* with all its peculiarities in language, style and content posed a challenge to the accepted author ascription that philologists attempted to deal with by specifying and thereby modifying the image of the author. While such modifications were often based on historical knowledge, elements of myth-making remained part of the picture. Whether it was the flawless

[345] James Turner, *Philology. The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014), 115-119. For Wolf's claim, see Friedrich August Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer, 1795. Translated with Introduction and Notes by Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and James E.G. Zetzel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 70.

[346] It is worth noting that Wolf was a contemporary (and pen pal) of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), the author of some of the most fiery celebrations of the creative genius, such as the poem "Prometheus." Broadly speaking, the emphasis on the individuality of the author in literature gained traction at the same time as philologists moved towards the individual that had shaped the text, be it actual author or later transmitter. Whether or not the one influenced the other, and by which mechanism, is a question that has to remain unanswered for the time being. It is intriguing, however, that in what would appear to be a parallel development, Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (early 18th century-1763/64) inserted a *sphragis* into his *Dream of the Red Chamber*. With this, contrary to the common practice of anonymity, he inscribed his authorship into the first chapter of the work: "Later, Cao Xueqin perused it in the Studio of Mourning Red for ten years, editing it five times, (…)." See Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹, *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber) (Taibei: Zhiyang chubanshe, 1999), 3.

moral character of Confucius or the depiction of Homer as a primitive bard,[347] scholars brought assumptions to the texts that were clearly indebted to contemporary intellectual trends. In whatever direction these assumptions took researchers, their roots lay in the need to delineate in detail who the author was.

As I have shown in this study, the concern for more detailed knowledge about the author of a text can be linked to the destabilization of the text and attempts to bring the text in line with purist ideals. For both developments, the narrow concept of authorship served as the catalyst. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, "the author-function does not work in a universal and constant manner in all discourses."[348] In order to clarify how the author-figure functioned in different philological traditions, it is necessary to trace in detail in which contexts scholars evoked it, and how they used it to make sense of the text. Beyond the institutional, social and wider intellectual factors (such as interpretation) that shaped philology in its development, highly abstract concepts informed the practice of textual scholarship.

[347] Friedrich August Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer*, 8-14.
[348] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in idem, *Dits et écrits 1: 1954-1969* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 799.

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Samenvatting

Concepten van auteurschap in de Chinese filologie van de late keizertijd

Tijdens de Qing-dynastie (1644–1912) domineerde filologie het wetenschappelijke discours in China. Geleerden werkten uitvoerig aan overgeleverde teksten uit ongeveer 500 tot 200 voor Christus en gebruikten hun geraffineerde methodologie om onderscheid te maken tussen wat authentiek is en wat niet. Dit proefschrift is een studie van de discussies die geleerden hierover hadden en stelt dat twee factoren de tekstuele wetenschap tijdens de 18e eeuw doorslaggevend gevormd hebben. Ten eerste was het uitgangspunt van het conceptuele kader dat er slechts één auteur kon worden toegeschreven aan elke tekst en ten tweede beschouwden geleerden de wijzen der oudheid als onfeilbare toonbeelden van deugd. De ontvangen teksten waren echter moeilijk te rijmen met deze veronderstellingen. Dientengevolge concludeerden de geleerden dat de tekstuele overlevering ongeloofwaardig was en wezen, uitgaande van hun concept van auteurschap, op invoegingen van onrechtmatige bijdragers. Dit proefschrift toont aan dat het nauwe concept van auteurschap de leidende factor was in hun filologisch werk waardoor ze de ontvangen teksten in een ander licht zagen en aanleiding gaf tot wijdverbreide bezorgdheid over vervalsingen. Door middel van een casestudy van de discussies over de *Analecten* toont hoofdstuk 1 aan hoe het concept van auteurschap dat geleerden gebruikten van invloed was op de kleinste details van hun betrokkenheid met deze tekst. Hoofdstuk 2 analyseert een theorie van auteurschap die bedoeld was om de beperkingen van het nauwe concept van auteurschap te ondervangen. Hoofdstuk 3 toont aan dat de geïdealiseerde biografieën van auteurs die geleerden construeerden de contemporaine interpretaties van teksten die met een auteur geassocieerd werden weerspiegelen. Hoofdstuk 4 bestudeert theorieën over wetenschap en wetenschappelijke redetwisten als pogingen om de uitdagingen die het conceptuele kader met zich meebracht te behandelen.

Summary

Conceptualizing Authorship in Late Imperial Chinese Philology

During the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) philology dominated the scholarly discourse in China. Scholars worked extensively on received texts dating from around 500 to 200 BCE and employed their sophisticated methodology to them in order to distinguish the authentic from the spurious. This dissertation is a study of the discussions scholars had on the topic and argues that two factors decisively shaped Chinese textual scholarship of the 18th century. First, the conceptual framework on which it rested posited only one author for each text; second, scholars considered the sages of antiquity infallible paragons of virtue. However, received texts were at odds with both assumptions. As a result of this tension, scholars argued that the textual records could not be trusted and, based on their concept of authorship, pointed to insertions of unauthorized contributors. This dissertation shows that the narrow concept of authorship was the most determining factor in their philological work, forcing them to view received texts in a different light and giving rise to the wide-spread concern over forgeries. Through a case study of the discussions about *Analects*, chapter 1 shows how the concept of authorship that scholars employed influenced the minutest details of their engagement with this text. Chapter 2 analyzes a theory of authorship that was meant to overcome the limitations of the narrow concept of authorship. Chapter 3 shows that the idealized author-biographies that scholars constructed closely reflect contemporary interpretations of the texts associated with an author. Chapter 4 explores theories of scholarship and scholarly disputes as attempts to address the challenges generated by the conceptual framework.

Curriculum Vitae

Daniel Stumm, born in 1988 in Traben-Trarbach, Germany, works on Chinese intellectual history from the 17th to the 20th century. He received his BA and MA in Chinese Studies from Heidelberg University, Germany. Between 2015 and 2019, he conducted research for his PhD at the Leiden Institute for Area Studies.